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THE
HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

VOL. I.

LONDON
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THE

HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "ADELAIDE."

Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!
SIR WALTER SCOTT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

CHAPTER I.

——— I will make a desperate tender
Of my child's love: I think she will be rul'd
In all respects by me; nay more, I doubt it not.
SHAKSPEARE.

MR. WILLOUGHBY was the only child of a country gentleman of small independent fortune, who had spent the greatest part of his life very comfortably and respectably at his own estate in a retired corner of England.

The tastes of the father were naturally quiet, and his temper unaspiring; and the remote probability of inheriting a remarkably fine landed property had never led him to form a single dream of ambition.

The disposition of the son was more restless and worldly. The accidental sight of a review had induced him at a very early age to express a decided wish to be allowed to go into the

army. He was a tall handsome youth, and the acuteness and intelligence he displayed upon every occasion seemed to promise that he was well calculated to rise to distinction in the profession he had chosen. It had been Mr. Willoughby's intention to purchase for him a commission in one of the regiments of the line; but when a young man, who had been Charles's particular friend at school, was placed in the Guards, he was seized with an ardent desire to enter the same corps himself. This fancy would not probably have been indulged, had not his father's plans been influenced by a communication which he received from the distant relation in the entail of whose estate his name occupied a prominent

up,) to the person whose claim to his inheritance would eventually be next to her own. Everything he heard of Charles's character seemed to confirm the eligibility of such an alliance; and when he learned that his father was about to place him in the army, he wrote to Mr. Willoughby to inform him of the plan he had projected, and to suggest that, if it met with his approbation, it would not be necessary that his son should enter very seriously into any profession. He said that, having left college, a short service in the Guards, or in a Dragoon regiment, might form his manners and occupy his time, and, by bringing him constantly into the society of young men of rank and fashion, might prepare him to adorn that station in the world which his future fortune would entitle him to hold.

Mr. Willoughby was much startled by receiving an overture of this nature from a relation with whom he had hitherto had very little intercourse. He weighed the matter calmly in his mind, for he was not dazzled by the brilliant prospect that was thus opened to his son. He felt, however, that the proposal was in many points of view so advantageous, that he should not be justified in declining it. He thought that as Charles himself was the

person most deeply interested in it, it would be right to talk the subject very fully over with him before he formed any decision upon it; and he determined that, if the young man expressed the least reluctance to enter into a conditional engagement with Miss Mordaunt, he would fairly tell her father that he would never attempt to persuade his son to marry against his own inclination.

Charles listened to Mr. Willoughby's communication with evident satisfaction. Young as he was, he was far from being insensible to the advantages of fortune, and he very readily assented to the project of an alliance with his cousin. Mr. Mordaunt was delighted to learn that everything seemed to conspire to favour the success of his plan. His hint about the Guards was complied with, and in a few months he had the pleasure of reading Charles Willoughby's name in the Gazette.

The young Guardsman did not disappoint the sanguine expectations of his friends. He contrived to make his way very well in the world, and to become popular with his brother officers, and courted in society. Mr. Mordaunt congratulated himself upon the choice he had made for his daughter. Mr. Willoughby looked upon him with proud affection; and

when he was sometimes called upon to pay certain large bills which his son had contracted, he cheerfully submitted to the temporary inconvenience, and consoled himself by reflecting, 'that if Charles was inclined to be a little extravagant, he need not distress himself upon the subject, since he would hereafter have the means of indulging his expensive habits.'

Miss Mordaunt had occasionally seen her handsome cousin, when he called upon her father during their annual visits to London: and one morning, just after he had left them, Mr. Mordaunt hinted to her pretty plainly that Charles was the person he hoped she would accustom herself to consider as her future husband. She attended in silence to this intimation, and did not afterwards express a single objection to the idea of the union thus likely to be forced upon her.

Her feelings towards Charles had hitherto been those of indifference. She had indeed observed the marked attention with which he uniformly treated her, and had been rather piqued by his seeming to expect that he had a sort of right to be regarded with preference by her in return. She had been much bored, too, by hearing his merits constantly extolled

by her father: this unvarying theme had at length become so wearisome to her, that she was half inclined to wish she could discover some faults or imperfections in the vaunted pattern of excellence. She now determined, however, that the next time they met, she would scrutinize her cousin's character with a very different kind of interest, and endeavour to ascertain if she could learn to like him.

Miss Mordaunt was at this period just seventeen, and she felt an almost childish delight at the prospect of escaping from her lessons and from the restraint of the school-room, and of emancipating in some degree from the dull routine of life imposed upon her by her father's formal habits. Her mother's sister had undertaken to act as her chaperon while she remained in town; the gay season was about to commence, and the following week she was to be presented.

Charles Willoughby was asked to dine at Mr. Mordaunt's the day of the drawing-room, but he happened unfortunately to be upon guard, which prevented his accepting the invitation. The young heiress had scarcely time to regret his absence, for she went to her first ball that evening. She was charmed with her own dress and appearance, enchanted with the gaiety of

the whole scene, and most particularly pleased by some fine high-flown compliments that were paid her by a pennyless Irishman of good family. In short, she returned home impressed with a conviction that a ball was the most delightful thing in the world; and when her cousin came the following morning to express the mortification he had felt at being unable to fulfil his engagement the day before, she received him rather coolly, and certainly did not appear to participate in his regret.

She soon became involved in a succession of balls and parties. Charles danced with her most dutifully, but he could not succeed in insinuating himself into her good graces; she continued to treat him with a sort of cold and distant reserve, the secret of which was fully explained, when, at the end of two months, she contrived to escape from her father's house, and ran away to Gretna Green with the dashing unprincipled Irish fortune-hunter.

The possibility of his daughter's marrying anybody but Charles Willoughby had never once occurred to Mr. Mordaunt's mind, nor indeed had it struck that of the other party most interested in the subject. As a father, he thought he had an undisputed right to dictate the object of her choice, and he was perfectly

the effects of this distressing blow; and
it did not prove immediately fatal, it
contributed to hasten his death.

It would be easier to imagine tha
scribe Charles Willoughby's astonishm
consternation when he was informed
elopement of his intended wife. He
much perplexed by the stiffness of her
towards him, but his *amour propre* tau
to believe that this was only manner
a comfortable assurance that she coul
otherwise than pleased with the prospe
union with so handsome and agreeable
as himself. His vanity was deeply
by the slight he had received, and hi
plans were altogether unhinged; yet
the consolation of feeling that his affecti
escaped unwounded.

Miss Mordaunt, though an elegant, p
looking girl, was not handsome: had
her under ordinary

it was, he thought that after their marriage he could learn to like *her* as well as any other heiress; and he had taught himself to consider a large fortune as a very requisite appendage to his happiness.

Though their engagement had never been publicly announced, a rumour of it had been pretty generally circulated among their mutual acquaintance; and as many people had formerly congratulated Charles upon his good-luck, he found that still more were now ready to condole with him upon his disappointment.

To avoid being stared at as an object of commiseration, he determined to go out of town for a few weeks. He was really anxious to see his father, whose kind expressions of concern and distress, on hearing of the mortifying event which had so sadly blighted his hopes, had touched him with the liveliest gratitude. And he well knew that, long before his return to London, fifty other circumstances would have occupied the attention of his friends, and that his own affairs would consequently be entirely forgotten.

He had no difficulty in obtaining leave of absence. Another officer, who was to set out for the country at the same period as himself,

pressed him so warmly to stop in his road h
and spend a day or two with him at his
friend's place, about twenty miles from to
that he found it impossible to decline doing
When they arrived at their destination, th
were told there was a very large and gay par
staying in the house, and Mr. Willoughby w
not a little vexed to discover that the gues
were almost all persons to whom he was wel
known, and who would therefore be curious t
see how he bore his disappointment.

The first figures who met his eye when he entered the drawing-room before dinner, were those of Mrs. Selwin and her daughter. Miss Selwin was extremely handsome, and very accomplished; she had great ease of manner without being the least forward, and talked well and fluently upon all fashionable topics of conversation. In short, she was a very agreeable specimen of a London young lady.

Charles had been much struck by her beauty the first time he saw her, and had involuntarily wished that Miss Mordaunt had been like her. He begged to be introduced to her, and found her so fascinating a person that, circumstanced as he began to think it would be dan-
a great deal in her society. Upon
the matter, however, he persuad-

himself that it would be absurd to give up Miss Selwin's acquaintance merely because she was agreeable. He resolved to take an early opportunity of explaining to her his own engagement, and having thus conscientiously done all that the strictest sense of honour could require of him, he fancied he might afterwards consider her as a friend, and talk to her as much as he pleased.

Accordingly, one evening when they had been amusing themselves by watching a flirtation, he said, "That it was very allowable to laugh at such things, but that, seriously speaking, he much envied those who were left at liberty to make their own choice in an affair of such vital importance to their happiness. That such was not *his* case: that a wife had been selected for him by others, and that he had consented to their future union, before he had seen enough of the world to be able to understand his own feelings."

Miss Selwin listened to this confidence without speaking, but she looked much surprised, and the next time they met she seemed to wish to avoid him. He affected not to perceive this, and, placing himself beside her, he asked her her opinion of the last new opera.

She answered him without embarrassment:

she continued to dance with him as she had done before, and her manner towards him remained perfectly unaltered; but it was evident that she had determined never to give any person an opportunity of remarking that he treated her with peculiar attention. She once requested him to point Miss Mordaunt out to her, adding, "that she had discovered that she was the young lady to whom he had formerly alluded."

It was with no very enviable sensation that Mr. Willoughby sought his cousin's features in the crowd before him, and it was in a tone bordering strongly upon disgust that he at length exclaimed,

"She is so little remarkable that I could scarcely find her, but there she is — the pale girl standing nearly opposite to us."

"Is that Miss Mordaunt?" observed Miss Nesbitt, in a voice of astonishment. "I have often seen her before, but could never make out what was her name. May I ask who is the gentleman she is talking to?"

"I really do not exactly know, though his face seems extremely familiar to me."

"I have frequently noticed it also," replied his companion rather dryly; and the conversation began to assume such an embarrassing

turn that neither of them felt inclined to continue it.

It has often been said, and perhaps with great justice, that although the parties may deceive themselves for a time as to the real nature of their sentiments, a Platonic friendship almost always ends in a tender attachment. When Charles Willoughby's eye met Miss Selwin's in the drawing-room at Mr. Hampton's, his heart beat violently, such a sensation came over him as he had never before experienced, and he was suddenly awakened to the happiness of feeling himself released from his engagement to his cousin.

Mrs. Selwin shook hands with him very graciously, and when he advanced towards her daughter, a deep blush overspread her whole countenance: Miss Selwin did not blush very frequently, and he thought he had never before seen her look half so beautiful. He sat next to her at dinner, and was not a little gratified by the unusual kindness of her manner; she seemed to wish to put him at ease with himself, and to try to make him forget that he might be a subject of observation to the rest of the company. In the evening she very delicately ventured to express the sincere sympathy she had felt for him during the last few days; cen-

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and that he perfectly hated himself
[illegible]ring agreed to an engagement which
have ended in wretchedness.

[illegible]planation was probably very eloquent.
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[illegible]loped, before she herself knew who either
them were; and that it was this circum-
[illegible]nce which had caused her to utter an expres-
[illegible]n of astonishment when his cousin had been
first pointed out to her.

The subject was altogether so interesting both to Mr. Willoughby and to Miss Selwin, that they constantly recurred to it. Their conversation assumed an air of confidence which

sured very severely Miss Mordaunt's wicked and unprincipled conduct; and added something about her unpardonable folly in having thrown away the happiness that was within her reach, and the bad taste she had shown in the choice she had made.

Never had flattery fallen upon Mr. Willoughby's ear in so agreeable and insinuating a guise, and he was far from being proof against its fascinating influence. He was smarting under the vexation of a recent insult. He had just been treated with signal contempt by a woman for whom he had consented to sacrifice his best affections,—a woman whom he had despised too much to be able to love, and whose only recommendation was found in the length of her rent-roll. He now saw himself regarded with gratifying interest by the beautiful person who had always been the secret idol of his admiration — he heard himself indirectly praised by her who excelled his cousin as much in every mental qualification as she did in appearance, and who was inferior to her in nothing but in fortune.

The contrast was most striking; and, as it rose upon Charles's imagination, he became every moment more deeply disgusted with Miss Mordaunt's character, and more captivated with

that of Miss Selwin. He longed to hear the latter repeat every word of kindness she had spoken — he was impatient to assure her that, far from being grieved by the failure of his marriage, he rejoiced sincerely at the escape he had made ; and that he perfectly hated himself for ever having agreed to an engagement which could only have ended in wretchedness.

His explanation was probably very eloquent, for Miss Selwin received it with evident satisfaction. He was a good deal surprised when she told him she had happened to observe that a peculiar understanding existed between Miss Mordaunt and the gentleman with whom she had eloped, before she herself knew who either of them were ; and that it was this circumstance which had caused her to utter an expression of astonishment when his cousin had been first pointed out to her.

The subject was altogether so interesting both to Mr. Willoughby and to Miss Selwin, that they constantly recurred to it. Their conversation assumed an air of confidence which made other people feel that it would be impertinent to join in it, and Mrs. Selwin had too much discretion ever to interrupt the sort of *tête-à-tête* which was thus established between them.

It has been observed that Charles Willoughby was a worldly-minded young man, and that he neglected no opportunity of promoting his own interest; yet, by a strange contradiction in his character, he was often carried away by a sudden impulse, and led on inconsiderately to do the most imprudent things. Some of the most important events of his life had been influenced by the rash starts of this sort of excitement. In the present instance he shut his eyes to the danger of the enchantment from which he had not power or inclination to tear himself away. He was conscious that Miss Selwin's society became every hour more essential to his happiness. He delayed his departure from day to day, and at length, in returning one evening from a very gay and pleasant rural fête, to which all the guests at Mr. Hampton's had been invited, the words which decided his destiny were spoken—he proposed to Miss Selwin, and was accepted.

For a long time after he retired to his own room he felt far too happy and too much excited to be able to compose himself to rest; sleep came at last, and when he wakened in the morning, he had only a confused recollection of the new engagement he had contracted. As his ideas began by degrees to arrange them-

selves, some very uncomfortable misgivings as to the prudence of the step he had taken, started up in awkward array before him. In herself Miss Selwin was everything he could wish her to be; but common sense suggested that a portionless wife was very ill suited to an extravagant young man, whose present means were extremely slender, and whose fortune hereafter would not be large enough to allow him to live in a style which accorded with the views and habits he had formed.

He shrunk from the prospect of involving a person he was attached to in the difficulties he felt excessively unwilling to encounter himself; and he was almost tempted to regret that he had ever come to Mr. Hampton's. However, it was now too late to recall what had passed, his honour was pledged; and he dressed himself with the intention of writing to his father before he went down stairs.

He began several letters; but between the awkwardness he felt about knowing how to announce his rash marriage, and shame at having so speedily got over his disappointment, he found it impossible to finish any of them, and, instead of writing, he resolved to go and break the matter to his father in person.

The sight of his beloved Augusta, and the

congratulations of his friends, (who had been informed in confidence by her mother of the approaching union,) soon dispelled all his uneasy reflections. Little remained to be talked over; the whole party was about to disperse; and the following day, Mrs. and Miss Selwin returned to town to prepare the *trousseau*, and Charles set out for his father's abode.

Mr. Willoughby's astonishment was mingled with deep consternation when he heard of his son's imprudent engagement, but he determined to make the best of what was inevitable. He declared he was sure he should be pleased with his daughter-in-law; kindly impressed upon Charles the necessity of learning to become prudent and economical, as a married man and a poor man; and make every personal sacrifice in his power to give him as liberal an allowance as possible. The settlements and all other preliminary arrangements were very speedily completed, and it was not without a pang of vexation that Mr. Mordaunt's daughter read in the newspaper a detailed account of the very smart wedding of Mr. Charles Willoughby and the beautiful and accomplished Miss Selwin.

Mr. Willoughby remained in the Guards, and it was not long before he began to feel the discomfort and difficulty of adhering to the

plan of strict economy which he had been obliged to form. He had an instinctive horror of running into debt, which he well knew would be purchasing temporary gratification at the expense of permanent distress. He was too selfish to give up without regret any luxury in which he had been accustomed to indulge, and too proud not to be sensitively afraid that the world should discover his poverty. Thus he had a constant struggle to maintain in checking his own expensive fancies, and a constant subject of anxiety in endeavouring to keep up appearances.

Mrs. Willoughby was fortunately not extravagant either by nature or education, and she strove hard to make the most of their fortune, and to remedy as far as possible by her attention and good management the inconvenient effects of the wasteful habits her husband had contracted. All her retrenchments were quietly and privately made, and it was by herself that they were principally felt. Her drawing-room was particularly pretty and elegant, her little dinners were excellent, and her dress was always smart and fashionable. Nobody suspected that, when Mr. Willoughby dined out, she sat up late and worked hard to manufacture the becoming hats, and to make with her own deli-

cate fingers the beautiful gowns, that were universally admired when she wore them.

The successive births of three children of course increased the difficulties and expenses of Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby; and when the two youngest were carried off by the hooping-cough, it was supposed that their father did not consider their loss as a great calamity. He sold his commission in the Guards, but he continued to live in London, and at his father's death he determined to let his place in the country. One of his neighbours having soon after made him an advantageous offer for his house and property, he very readily consented to dispose of his patrimonial estate.

His circumstances were in future much less straitened, and his years flowed on in ease at least, if not in affluence. Before the period at which our tale commences, his eldest son had grown up to man's estate, and, having shown a decided preference for the army, had been placed in the Dragoons. Another son and a daughter, (both of whom were considerably younger than their brother,) completed the family. Edward was intended for the church, and was studying at Oxford; and Augusta was nearly old enough to come out.

Mr. Willoughby had never seen his cousin

since her elopement; her husband had taken her immediately to Ireland, where he always left her when he went away to amuse himself elsewhere; his cruel treatment broke her heart, and she died young, unpitied, and neglected.

She left a numerous family, but, either from natural delicacy or from want of proper care, only two of the poor little orphans survived their childhood. The death of one of these children was peculiarly melancholy; he had been allowed by his nurse to wander out alone, and, as a labourer had seen him playing close to the edge of the river, it was supposed that he must have fallen over the bank and been drowned. The water was deep and the stream rapid, and his body could never be discovered.

The survivors were both sons, and their education was miserably neglected. When the eldest attained his majority he took the name of Mordaunt, and was put into possession of all his mother's property. He married a disreputable woman much older than himself, and broke his neck some years afterwards by falling down stairs in a state of brutal intoxication. The second, who had chosen to go into the army, had been killed in a duel a few months before the catastrophe that terminated his brother's life.

As neither of them left heirs, the Mordaunt estates of course devolved to Mr. Willoughby as the next relation in succession; and he thus at length became most unexpectedly possessed of the rich inheritance which he had formerly been destined to share with his cousin.

This sudden acquisition of fortune seemed to promise him every worldly happiness he could desire. He could in future form no wish he would not have the power of gratifying. He was raised at once to weight and consequence. His wife would be rewarded for all her past privations by sharing with him the enjoyment of his wealth; and his children would henceforward be able to command all those advantages he had hitherto regretted being incapable of procuring for them.

He was impatient to go down into the country and make preparations for inhabiting his fine old place; and he lost no time in looking out for a house in London handsome enough to accord with his present circumstances.

CHAPTER II.

——— Ne'er did Grecian chisel trace
A Nymph, a Naiad, or a Grace,
Of finer form, or lovelier face!
SIR WALTER SCOTT.

THE inheritance Mr. Willoughby succeeded to was situated in one of the midland counties. By a clause in the entail, he was enjoined "to bear the name and arms of Mordaunt only," a condition he very readily complied with; and he relinquished his former appellation without one pang of regret. His new domain was very extensive, and his house large and handsome. It had latterly been kept in very bad order, and it required much repair, as well as newly fitting up. A professional person was immediately engaged to superintend the improvements and alterations out of doors, and Mrs. Mordaunt's taste was appealed to to choose the furniture and direct the interior decorations.

Much progress might be made in these works in a few months; and it was expected that by the end of the next London season everything at Mordaunt would be in a state of sufficient forwardness to allow the new possessors to come down and establish themselves in their country residence. Their daughter would not be seventeen until the following autumn, and they consequently thought her too young to go out in town that year.

Augusta Mordaunt inherited her mother's beauty, and was by no means inferior to her in accomplishments; but, without being shy, she had more timidity of character and less confidence in herself. Though she had been brought up entirely in London, she was perfectly artless and unaffected; and the gaiety of her disposition was reflected in her countenance, and gave an additional charm to her naturally graceful manner. Her figure was tall and finely proportioned; she had a delicately fair complexion, very dark hair,—and her eyes, (which were fringed with uncommonly long eyelashes,) were that deep shade of blue which is often mistaken for black.

Augusta had never had a governess; Mrs. Mordaunt had undertaken the task of being her instructress, and, without neglecting any of

her other numerous occupations, had always found time to attend very strictly to her daughter's education. Her anxiety, however, had been chiefly directed to her accomplishments; though she had also endeavoured to oblige her to acquire just as much superficial knowledge as might entitle her to be considered clever and well-informed in this learned and scientific age. Upon the culture of her mind and the formation of her principles she had not thought it necessary to bestow much pains. She had never taught her to reflect seriously upon the duties of religion, and Augusta consequently believed that she fulfilled them very respectably if she went regularly to church once every Sunday.

Mrs. Mordaunt herself had been brought up much in the same manner. She was one of those people who are justly looked upon by all their acquaintance as patterns of worldly excellence, since she was exemplary in the performance of every moral duty. Endowed with good sense, and naturally amiable and well-disposed, she did everything that was right and proper by a happy sort of instinct,—for it must be confessed that her conduct was not guided by any higher principle. She was an admirable wife; her devotion to her husband made her

regard it as the first object of her life to promote his interest and comfort, and she considered no sacrifice too great to be cheerfully submitted to for his sake. Her affection for her children, and the care with which she presided over their education, were universally praised; but had any one taken the trouble of analyzing her system of instruction, it would have been discovered that it tended to train up her pupils, not in the fear of God, but rather in the fear of the world.

Her sons were of course sent to school at an early age, and thus taken out of her hands; but her daughter's character had (as we have seen) been moulded by herself alone.

As a beautiful child, Augusta had been dressed up and brought down to the drawing-room to be admired by all her mother's visitors; but when she grew a great girl, she was kept more in the background, under pretence of being obliged to attend to her studies. Mrs. Mordaunt perceived that she would probably be extremely pretty; and she thought that she was likely to make a much greater sensation when she came out, if she had not been previously seen.

She had few relations, and had never been encouraged to form any intimacies with com-

panions of her own age. Her brother Edward was her great friend and ally; when he was at home they were almost inseparable, and she loved him far more than anybody else in the world. She felt a most affectionate admiration for her brother Charles, but he had been almost constantly absent with his regiment—he was ten years older than herself;—when they happened to be together, he treated her quite as a child, and she was consequently rather afraid of him. She was warmly and dutifully attached to her father and mother; yet of the former she stood much in awe, and to the latter (whom she regarded as the cleverest and most accomplished person in existence) she looked up with a respect almost bordering upon veneration.

Having said thus much of the sister, it is necessary to give some description of the brothers. The eldest was a fine high-spirited young man; he had great decision of character, was rather haughty and overbearing in his temper, and was much devoted to his profession, in which he was considered an excellent and promising officer.

The second was a lively, warm-hearted, amiable youth, who united the most engaging gentleness of disposition and manners with uncommon firmness of mind.

Both were extremely good-looking. Charles's figure was tall and commanding, and his dark eyes sparkled with fire and intelligence. Edward was shorter and more slightly made; his complexion was fair, his features regular, and their expression peculiarly agreeable.

He had spent all his holidays and vacations at home; and if he had formerly looked forward with satisfaction to the idea of taking orders, the prospect had now become doubly delightful to him, since the valuable living of Mordaunt was in his father's gift; and at the death of the present incumbent, who was represented to be an old man, he would be comfortably established in a good house, not above three-quarters of a mile distant from his own family, and within distance of a walk of his beloved Augusta.

The works at the Park proceeded rapidly; and, early in July, Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt, accompanied by their daughter and their youngest son, arrived there to inspect them. They were to be joined by Charles in the course of the autumn; but, as he had been amusing himself in town in the spring, it was uncertain how soon he might again be able to obtain leave of absence.

The village-bells were rung at the approach

of the party, the horses were taken out of their carriage, and they were welcomed with every demonstration of respect and rejoicing by the tenants and peasantry, who were delighted at hearing that their landlord intended to reside among them. They had suffered so much from the misrule and exactions of his predecessors, that they were fully aware of the comfort and advantage they should derive from the presence and protection of a different sort of master; and the old people said that it reminded them of good old times, to see a respectable family come down to live upon their own estate.

Miss Mordaunt was delighted with a reception at once so flattering and so different from what she had expected. She was much pleased, too, with the size and extent of the handsome place she was now to consider her home, and dazzled with the consequence that seemed to be attached to everything connected with it. She had never in her life been farther than a ten-miles drive from London, except during the short visit she had before made to Mordaunt. It was then the depth of the winter; the weather was bad, the house looked desolate and unfurnished, and the whole scene had an air of wretchedness. All was now changed: the rooms appeared

gay and cheerful; and though they were not yet finished, enough had been done to show how comfortable and luxurious they would be. The garden had been put in order; and new parterres had been formed, and filled with a profusion of plants which were in full bloom. Augusta thought it quite a little paradise. Every object out of doors was new to her. She was enchanted with the fine old oaks in the park, the wild scenery of the woods, and the freshness of the fields. She had never imagined anything so enjoyable as her long rambles with Edward; and she found it delightful to be able to go out again in the evening, and to walk by moonlight. With the ardent enthusiasm of early youth, she magnified all the charms of a country life, and declared "that she wondered how it was possible that any persons, who could spend their time among the beauties of Nature, should prefer shutting themselves up in a crowded town, where they were half-suffocated with smoke and dust."

Mrs. Mordaunt was much amused with the *naïveté* of Augusta's admiration of roses and green fields; and she secretly smiled to think how soon she would change her opinion of the comparative pleasures of town and country,

was so lady-like in her manner, that her appearance was very prepossessing. Her *élève* Laura was extremely pretty, and her disposition was as amiable as the most anxious wishes of her friends could desire it to be.

Miss Mordaunt was much pleased with her young guest, and delighted to think that she was so near a neighbour. She expressed a hope that they should see a great deal of each other; and she was sadly disappointed when she found that Dr. Stanley was going the following week to the sea for his health, and that he intended to be absent from home for three months.

Edward happened to be out when the visitors arrived; and when he entered the room, soon after their departure, he found his father and mother still talking them over.

"Doctor Stanley," observed Mr. Mordaunt, "is a very learned, and I believe a very good man, but his health seems terribly infirm; he does not give me the idea of being likely to remain much longer in this world."

"He certainly appears a great deal older than I had expected to see him," answered Mrs. Mordaunt. "But what do you think of the daughters? The eldest is always represented as a particularly clever, excellent person;

CHAPTER III.

Beggars and vagabonds, blind, lame, and sturdy,
Minstrels and singers with their various airs,
The pipe, the tabor, and the hurdy-gurdy,
Jugglers and mountebanks with apes and bears,
Continued, from the first day to the third day,
An uproar like ten thousand Smithfield fairs:
All sorts of people there were seen together,
All sort of characters, all sorts of dresses.

Mr. Frere.

Mr. Mordaunt had been some time established in the country, when he received a pressing invitation from his old friend Mr. Wingfield, to pay him a visit in Yorkshire. He named the exact period when he wished him to join his party, and added, that he hoped Mrs. Wingfield would be able to persuade the ladies to accompany her to the Doncaster Races.

Mrs. Mordaunt would have liked this plan well enough for herself, but she was much disposed to decline it, because she thought it might prove a disadvantage to her daughter to go to a race-ball before she had appeared in London.

Mr. Mordaunt was of a different opinion. "Doncaster," he said, "was the best meeting of the kind in England; nobody could be supposed to acquire *mauvais ton* by being there. Augusta was seventeen; she could not be kept much longer in the school-room; but she was really so raw and childish in her ideas, that he should be almost ashamed to take her to Almack's. A little previous training in the country might prove very beneficial to her. She would not know a creature at the races except the party who went from Mr. Wingfield's, and it would not be necessary to introduce her to any one else — unless it was to those people of their own set whom they might happen to meet there."

It was not upon Augusta's account alone that her father deemed it would be desirable to go to Mr. Wingfield's. He had begun to tire of the monotony of his life at Mordaunt; his time was only partially occupied by business, he was not fond of reading, and the neighbourhood afforded him little society. He rode about his park or along the turnpike-road, but he had no taste for rural pursuits; and, in short, in spite of his newly-acquired fortune and consequence, he felt very much out of his element. He thought that an excursion from

home would make a very agreeable variety, and drive away the ennui that was creeping over him; and at Doncaster he was sure that he should find amusement.

Mrs. Mordaunt never failed to be persuaded by her husband's arguments: the Yorkshire invitation was accordingly accepted, and both Edward and Augusta looked forward with much satisfaction to their visit, and with more than satisfaction to the prospect of the races. Charles had also been included in the invitation; but he was, of course, unable to profit by it.

Mr. and Mrs. Wingfield gave their friends a very cordial reception.

"I am so glad," said the latter, addressing herself to Mrs. Mordaunt, "to see you here at last! We have asked nobody else this week. I thought that you and I might talk over our former days comfortably together, and I wished my daughters to become well acquainted with yours. How beautiful she is! and how very like what Augusta Selwin was before she married! Mr. Wingfield has some good shooting to offer Mr. Mordaunt and your son; and my boys will do their best to amuse the latter, who will, perhaps, condescend to join

ladies were returning from a walk, Miss Wingfield observed to Augusta, 'that when they reached the house, she should have the pleasure of introducing her to a good many new acquaintance.'

"Lord Delmore," she added, "is an old friend of yours; is he not?"

"No," replied Miss Mordaunt; "I never saw him in my life."

"That is very strange!" continued her companion, "considering that he is such a great and particular ally of your brother, Captain Mordaunt's."

"Oh," said Augusta, "nothing is more possible. Charles has a number of friends, but as I am not regularly come out, I have yet seen scarcely any of them. I do not, however, recollect having heard him mention Lord Delmore's name;—is he in the army?"

"He was, before his elder brother's death, and in the same regiment as Captain Mordaunt. Perhaps you may remember him better by the name of Mr. Lionel D'Arcy."

"Lionel D'Arcy!" exclaimed Miss Mordaunt; "to be sure I do. How very stupid of me to have forgotten his title! I knew he had succeeded to a peerage and a fortune; but when

you spoke of Lord Delmore, I little suspected who he was. I am very glad he is coming here, for I have heard so much about him, that I have a great curiosity to see him."

Miss Wingfield smiled, as she remarked, "Lord Delmore may, I suppose, be considered a neighbour of ours, since his place is only ten miles from here; but we are at present very slightly acquainted with him. His house is a very handsome one, and he will probably like to inhabit it; at least, during part of the year. He was very seldom there when his brother was alive."

The conversation was broken off here. When Augusta came down stairs, she directed a curious glance towards the newly-arrived guests, to try if she could discover which of them was Lord Delmore; but she saw no one who at all answered the description her imagination had formed of his appearance. Dinner was announced, and at that moment a tall, thin young man, with dark hair and eyes, entered the room. He was dressed in mourning, and he looked absent and melancholy; but there was an ease and an air of fashion about him, that showed at once he was high-born as well as high-bred. He apologised to Mrs. Wing-

fluid for being so late, merely bowed to those to whom he was introduced, and then offered her his arm to conduct her to the dining-room.

Augusta had expected that Charles's friend would have expressed some pleasure at meeting his family, and she felt rather disappointed when she observed that a simple recognition was all that passed between him and her father and mother. At dinner, she remarked that he talked very little, though his hostess and Miss Talbot, (who was placed on the other side of him), seemed very well inclined to favour him with much of their conversation. She had at first watched him from curiosity, but she could not help afterwards perceiving that his eyes were very frequently directed towards her in return.

As soon as the gentlemen came into the drawing-room in the evening, Lord Delmore and Edward advanced towards the place where Miss Mordaunt was sitting.

"Augusta," said her brother, "Lord Delmore wishes to be introduced to you. He would scarcely believe me just now, when I told him you were my sister: having always heard Charles speak of you as 'little Augusta,' he imagined you must still be a child."

Miss Mordaunt drew up her fine tall figure,

and felt half angry and half amused at this mistake. Lord Delmore took a chair near hers, and she soon found him so very agreeable, that she began to suspect she had been quite deceived in supposing he did not possess great conversational powers. He first talked to her of her eldest brother, a subject that was mutually interesting to them. He spoke of Charles with affection—almost enthusiasm; said "that he had ever found him his best as well as his dearest friend, and that he must always feel deeply grateful to him for the kind interest he had shown for him when very few other people cared what became of him."

"You can little understand, Miss Mordaunt," continued he, "how *much* I owe to your brother's friendship, or how great a pleasure I feel in acknowledging that debt to any of his family. I was told I was to find him here to-day, and I will truly confess to you that the prospect of meeting your party from Mordaunt was the only inducement that tempted me to accept Mr. Wingfield's invitation. Charles and I have formerly spent many happy days together in our barrack-rooms, as portionless soldiers of fortune; the fickle goddess has since been graciously pleased to smile upon us both—in *my* case the benefit was more than counterbalanced by a

... I assure you. And wh... my doors to my neig... I venture to hope that he will join me i... touring to prevail upon his family to ... earliest among the number of my guests

The slight sketch that has been alread... of Augusta's character has shown that h... ings were warm and her temper enthu... She was delighted to find a person whos... views seemed so congenial to her own, ... less than half an hour she became as m... home with Lord Delmore as if she had ... known all her life.

Meanwhile it may naturally be sup... that the length and animation of what ... almost be termed their *tête-à-tête*, ha... engaged the observation of the rest of the ... party. Mrs. Mordaunt affected not to re... how her daughter was engaged; yet she fe... uneasiness at not hearing her solicite... display her brilliant powers of execution ...

proud of Emma's playing, was much gratified by the admiration her friend expressed for it; but she could not help secretly regretting that Lord Delmore possessed so little taste for music as not to be charmed with it also.

"What do you think of our neighbour the young peer?" said Miss Wingfield, addressing Miss Talbot, who had been standing by the pianoforte, and endeavouring to engage Edward Mordaunt in a flirtation.

"I do not like him at all," replied she; "he is so impracticable and exclusive."

"Miss Mordaunt does not appear to find him either one or the other."

"Oh, I suppose he considers *her* one of his own set. I dare say he is amusing her at this instant by turning us all into ridicule."

"He is very welcome to do so if he pleases; but I rather suspect that he scarcely deems us worthy of so much notice. If you do not admire his lordship, you must not however extend your disapprobation to his present companion; she is really a very nice girl, and *she* is, I am sure, quite free from affectation."

When the ladies went out walking after church the following morning, they were escorted by Lord Delmore; and it so happened that he found himself constantly by Augusta's side.

There was always some object in the landscape, some feature in the country, that he was desirous to point out to her; or he wished to show her exactly where D'Arcy was situated, or to tell her which were the distant woods that formed the boundary of his estate.

During this walk he discovered how entirely she had been brought up in London, and he was both interested and amused by the *naïveté* with which she at once confessed and deplored her ignorance of almost everything relating to the country.

"I must own," said he, laughing, "if you only misplaced the *v*'s and *w*'s, you would be the most complete cockney I ever met with. I really believe, that if I asked you what crops were growing in those two fields just before us, you would not be able to tell me which was wheat and which was beans. Much as you pretend to lament your want of knowledge, you put me greatly in mind of an old French *emigré*, who, having spent all the early part of his life in Paris, and most of his latter days in London, happened to be making a visit to a friend in the country. While they were walking in the garden, some ladies rallied the Frenchman upon his insensibility to the beauties of Nature, and declared that they imagined he did

not know one tree or flower from another. He avowed that it had come very little in his way to study such things, and that they certainly did not much interest him; but that they would find he was not quite so uninformed as they supposed. To convince them of the truth of this assertion, he pointed to a Scotch fir a few yards distant from them, and exclaimed, '*Par exemple, je sais bien que voilà un chêne.*'"

In the evening it was Lord Delmore who turned over the leaves of Miss Mordaunt's music-book, and it was Lord Delmore's plaudits which inspired her to play with more than usual brilliancy.

The day of the races arrived; the weather was beautifully fine, and everybody was in high spirits. It is needless to mention that Mrs. Mordaunt presided over her daughter's toilet with greater than ordinary anxiety, and that, after it was completed, Lord Delmore thought he had never seen Augusta look half so beautiful. All the party set out for Doncaster; and he begged Edward to be his companion in his britzka, as he said "he was aware that ladies did not like to be crowded upon these occasions by the gentlemen of their family."

If Miss Mordaunt had been much amused

during the drive by watching the carts and carriages of all sorts that passed her on the road; the jolly farmers and yeomen trotting along upon their stout-built, good-looking horses; now and then a man with a brisk-looking damsel on a pillion behind him, her hair *en papillote*, and a bandbox in her hand, containing her best gown and bonnet, all ready to enable her to make a hasty toilet in the town before she proceeded to the race; and the numbers of country people on foot, each and every one trudging eagerly towards the same point of attraction;—how greatly was she astonished and delighted with the scene of bustle, animation, and gaiety, that the course itself presented! The long line of handsome equipages of every description, the troops of horsemen, the crowds of pedestrians, the brilliant groups of ladies and gentlemen who already occupied the balconies on the stand; the extended row of gay booths, tents, and shows,—formed altogether a very striking and extraordinary *coup-d'œil*. Interest and expectation were portrayed in every countenance; and the anxious, eager faces of the black-legs were not a little remarkable. Their sharp, loud tones were distinguished, too, amidst the hum of thousands of mingled voices, and were not even

drowned by the vociferations of beggars, and the still more discordant screams of ballad-singers, and venders of correct cards and sheet-lists of all the running horses, the names, weights, and colours of the riders.

"Does all this answer your expectation, Miss Mordaunt?" inquired Lord Delmore, when he joined Augusta upon the stand.

"Oh yes, it far exceeds anything I could have imagined; I feel quite bewildered. But I want you to tell me who some of these smart people are, and to instruct me in the names and merits of the race-horses everybody appears so much interested about."

He brought her a printed card of the sport.

"Thank you," said Augusta; "but, having given me my book, you must also be so kind as to explain to me my lesson. Will you teach me how I am to bet?"

A cloud passed over Lord Delmore's countenance. "I cannot refuse any request of yours," replied he; "yet I fear you will in this instance find *me* a very unskilful instructor." Then in a more cheerful tone he added, "It is not necessary, however, that you should be very scientifically initiated into the arts of the turf."

Augusta was much startled by the alteration

of his look and manner, and she feared she must have made an injudicious request.

"Perhaps," she remarked, in a hesitating voice, "you do not think it right that ladies should bet."

"There can be no possible objection to their doing it," answered Lord Delmore, "in the manner you intend. I had formed a resolution never to make another bet myself; but the hope of winning a pair of white gloves from you, now tempts me to break it."

Augusta gaily remarked, "that her having for once led him to break through his rule, was a sin that would not weigh very heavily upon her conscience." And the bet was accordingly registered in pencil upon her card.

A few minutes afterwards, Miss Wingfield asked her to join in a half-crown lottery which she was arranging for the St. Leger the next day; and as Lord Delmore immediately put down his name just below hers, he whispered, "You see how dangerous it is to yield to a first temptation: I have been unable to resist following your example, and giving way to a second."

Mrs. Wingfield's party left the course early, that the young ladies might have time to rest before the ball; and the intermediate period

was naturally spent in talking over the occurrences of the morning, and commenting upon the dress and appearance of those persons who had been in any way most remarkable.

All public balls are so much alike in their general features, that it would be very uninteresting to give a minute detail of those three at Doncaster which Miss Mordaunt found particularly delightful. It is only necessary to observe, that Lord Delmore was her most constant partner, and that he scarcely danced with anybody else, except once or twice with the Miss Wingfields as a point of duty.

His devoted attention to Augusta was remarked by every one, and the gossiping part of the community set it down in their opinions as a decided certainty that it would not fail to be a match. His lordship's taste was generally approved, for Miss Mordaunt was much admired. She danced uncommonly well; the gentlemen were unanimous in their praise of her beauty: — as *a new young lady* in Yorkshire, and a *débutante* in the world, she attracted, of course, a large share of observation. In short, she was universally considered the belle of the races.

Miss Wingfield was much too good-natured to attack Augusta openly upon the subject of

Lord Delmore's admiration; but she could not resist once or twice insinuating how great an acquisition it would be to them whenever their neighbour might happen to marry, as she felt convinced the wife he would select would be just the sort of person she and her sister would like.

Miss Mordaunt could not misunderstand these hints; yet she had too humble an opinion of her own attractions to believe it possible that Lord Delmore could entertain such sentiments for her as her friends seemed to imagine. She thought he had only talked so much more to her than to other people, because she happened to be the sister of his friend, and because he was himself particularly good-natured. She considered him the most accomplished and delightful young man she had ever met. She looked up to him as to somebody quite superior to the rest of the world, and she felt very sure that she could never think any one else half so fascinating and agreeable.

Mrs. Mordaunt felt confident that Lord Delmore intended to propose for Augusta; yet, when her hostess ventured to express to her the pleasure she should have in congratulating her upon the event that was evidently approaching, she put on a face of uncertainty,

and replied, "that she only wished such a prophecy might come true; that nothing would give her greater happiness; but, that she confessed *she* always considered such affairs extremely doubtful until they were actually settled."

Lord Delmore had originally intended to remain at Mr. Wingfield's only during the Doncaster race-week; but he stayed on from day to day, and did not at last take his departure until the morning the Mordaunts set out for Mordaunt. His devotion to Augusta became every hour more apparent; he followed her like her shadow, and seemed scarcely able to exist out of her society; yet he had never spoken one word which could either directly or indirectly be construed into an avowal of attachment.

Mr. Mordaunt took an opportunity of asking him to come and see him at Mordaunt.

"It will give me much pleasure to do so," replied his lordship; "I have many things to settle, and much business to transact, which must detain me at home just at present. I should at any rate have gone into your neighbourhood some time hence to visit my relations at Estonville; but I trust you will believe me, when I assure you that I should have been

most happy to have made such a journey on purpose to accept your kind invitation."

The evening before they were to part, Lord Delmore was sitting by Miss Mordaunt as usual; he looked grave and thoughtful, and he was more than commonly silent. At length he said,

"I have been thinking of the truth of Madame de Sévigné's observation, 'que la mauvaise compagnie vaut bien mieux que la bonne, par le plaisir qu'on éprouve de s'en séparer.'"

"There is certainly much justice in the remark," answered Augusta; "yet she might have recollected the heavy tax of being previously bored to death, which could not fail to have been imposed upon her by the presence of the former, as well as the by-gone pleasure she must have enjoyed in the society of the latter."

"I promise you," exclaimed Lord Delmore with great animation, "*I* am not a person to forget *that*. I never can forget the happiness I have felt during the last fortnight in your society."

Miss Mordaunt coloured violently; he to fear that he had gone farther than

he intended, for he instantly checked himself, and suddenly stopped short.

They both looked much confused, and neither of them spoke again for some minutes. At last Lord Delmore broke the ice by asking when Charles was expected at home?

"I suppose," replied Augusta, "that he will be able to get his leave in the course of the autumn."

"Mr. Mordaunt," pursued her companion, "has been good enough to invite me to Mordaunt."

"We shall all be very glad to see you there," said she, rather coldly; "and I hope you will be able to come while my brother is with us."

Another long silence succeeded these words. Lord Delmore appeared to have something upon his mind which he was unable or did not choose to trust himself to express. He was evidently determined not to commit himself, and he seemed to find it impossible to talk upon common-place subjects.

Augusta wished, yet half dreaded, to hear the sentences which were struggling for utterance upon his lips. She felt a sort of suspicion that the crisis of her fate was arrived, and she

shrunk with apprehension at the idea of meeting it; but when she found she was mistaken,—that it did not advance,—her heart sunk with mortification and disappointment, and she was more than half inclined to be angry with herself, and affronted with Lord Delmore. She was much relieved when a summons to the pianoforte removed her from the awkward situation in which she was placed.

The young peer made no attempt to renew the conversation which had been thus interrupted, though she perceived that he afterwards watched her very attentively, and appeared desirous to read her feelings in the expression of her countenance. Not another word passed between them that evening; but when he handed her the next morning into the carriage which was to convey her away from Yorkshire, she thought there was a degree of tenderness in his manner towards her which she had never observed it assume before. It was then that for the first time she felt, if she could believe Lord Delmore really loved her, how deeply and devotedly she could love him in return.

CHAPTER IV.

Arnold. ——— My heart! Will it
Sustain that which you lay upon it, mother?
I love,—or, at the least, I loved you.

LORD BYRON.

LIONEL D'ARCY was extremely young when he lost his father, Lord Delmore. His mother had unfortunately taken a violent dislike to him, from a fancy she entertained that he was not her own child; she imagined that he had been changed by the nurse to whose care she had confided him when she left him for several months in the country, very soon after his birth. She seldom allowed him to be brought into her presence, while she centred all her affection in her eldest son—a delicate child, whose precarious health was a constant source of uneasiness and anxiety to her.

As the little peer was not considered strong enough to be trusted out of her own sight, a tutor was engaged to superintend his education at home; but it was judged desirable to send

the neglected Lionel as early as possible to a public school. From thence he was removed in due course of time, to be placed in the army. He had no great military vocation; but he had never been consulted about this plan himself—it was merely announced to him as having been decided for him by his guardians. Lady Delmore said, that a second son must do something; and while she satisfied her conscience by giving him a profession, she rejoiced to think that it would take him out of her own way.

Lionel's disposition was extremely affectionate, and he was cut to the heart by his mother's unnatural conduct towards him; he felt that he had not deserved the mortifying neglect with which she treated him, yet it crushed the buoyancy of his youthful spirits, and exerted a powerful influence over his whole character.

He found some compensation for Lady Delmore's cruel indifference in the strong attachment that had been always shown for him by his brother; who, without affecting to perceive the wide distinction that was made between them, endeavoured to soothe his wounded feelings by every act of delicate kindness and attention. Lionel loved Lord Delmore with more than fraternal affection; he looked up to him with the warmest gratitude, and he would will-

ingly have sacrificed his life to promote his interest or secure his welfare.

It had been the secret wish of both their families, almost from their infancy, that the young heir of the house of D'Arcy should marry his first cousin, Lady Agnes Mortimer; and the young lady had consequently been allowed to spend much of her time with her aunt. The parties were supposed to be much attached to each other, and it was intended that the union should take place immediately after Lord Delmore came of age. But before that period arrived, the fatal symptoms of consumption had begun to manifest themselves in the bridegroom's constitution. A speedy removal to a warmer climate, together with the unwearying care and attention of his mother, arrested for a space the progress of the disease; but it had taken too firm a hold of its victim to be entirely expelled, and, after lingering between life and death for more than four years, he expired, about eleven months before the period when we were first introduced to his brother.

When Lionel D'Arcy originally joined his regiment (which was the same in which Charles Willoughby had been placed), he was far from being popular with his brother officers. They

did not understand his character, and mistook for haughtiness and reserve the mortifying idea with which he was impressed that nobody liked him; an idea most unhappy for himself, but resulting naturally enough from the peculiar circumstances of his situation.

His pride made him shrink from the thought of seeking the friendship of any one by whom his advances might not possibly be received with a corresponding warmth; yet for those who seemed to feel an interest in his welfare, or who happened to have an opportunity of serving him, his attachment was as deep and faithful as it was enthusiastic.

Charles Willoughby chanced to take a fancy to Lionel from the first moment he saw him, and this prepossession was rather increased than diminished when he found that he was not a general favourite; he perceived, too, that the preference was mutual—that while the stranger held aloof from others, he rather courted his society; and the two young men soon became constant companions.

Lionel had been handsomely provided for by his father, and by nature he was more properly speaking liberal than extravagant. Yet, as all his bills had been hitherto settled by his guardians, he was so completely ignorant of the

value of money, that when he became his own master he spent at least double as much as he could afford, and he speedily found himself involved in pecuniary difficulties.

A feeling of false shame made him averse to adopt any plan of retrenchment, or to confess his embarrassment to his brother; and it was while things were in this state, that the hope of retrieving his fortune led him to plunge into high play.

Gambling had certainly never been intended to be his forte; he had no genius for calculating chances, or patience to bear reverses of luck. He staked deeply; bad success rendered him desperate, and he finally lost a very large sum. His feelings of remorse and despair at the ruin he had thus brought upon himself were so violent, that it required the exertion of all the powerful influence which Charles Willoughby possessed over his mind, to prevent him from committing some still more dreadfully fatal act.

Charles did not himself possess the means of offering Mr. D'Arcy pecuniary assistance; but he contrived to persuade the person to whom the debt was due, to keep it a secret, and also to wait for the payment until he heard the result of an application to Lord Delmore, who had attained his majority, and was then abroad.

In speaking of the latter, he carelessly insinuated that it was but too probable it would not be very long before Mr. D'Arcy succeeded to all his property.

He found it a much more difficult task to prevail upon his friend to appeal to his brother for aid. Yet no other alternative presented itself, and a letter was accordingly written and despatched to Lord Delmore.

Charles was not deceived in the effect he imagined this measure would produce: the amiable young peer instantly relieved Lionel from his present distress, and likewise settled upon him a competent yearly allowance during his own life. The business was altogether so quietly and well arranged, that very few people were aware that Mr. D'Arcy had ever been suffering under any embarrassment.

It will easily be believed that after the occurrence we have just related, Lionel's devoted attachment to his brother gained additional strength. He was deeply grieved by the reports he heard of his health; he could not rest satisfied with the accounts he received of him from others, and though he was aware that his presence would prove extremely unwelcome to his mother, he determined to obtain leave to go abroad and visit him.

He found him even worse than he had expected; and he felt it so impossible to bear the idea of leaving him in his present state, that he resolved, if his brother did not decidedly oppose such a plan, to sell his commission immediately, and dedicate his whole time to the invalid.

When he mentioned this purpose to Lord Delmore, he was rejoiced to observe that he was not at all averse to his carrying it into execution.

"My dear Lionel," said he, "the scheme you so kindly propose would, in a selfish point of view, be so very enjoyable to me, that I cannot find in my heart to advise you against it. I have no scruples about your giving up the army, because I know you never liked it;—besides," concluded he with a melancholy smile, "I feel that the time is not very distant, when it will be quite unnecessary for *you* to continue in any profession."

Lady Delmore, to whom, as a mark of respect, her son announced his intention, did not at all disapprove of the measure he was about to take. The distress she had suffered about her beloved Edward seemed in some degree to have softened her heart towards Lionel; she behaved towards him with more outward consideration

than she had ever done before, and she even expressed satisfaction at the prospect of his remaining with her abroad. Perhaps the approaching certainty of losing her eldest son, made her deem it expedient and desirable to be upon cordial terms with the second; and thus to secure for herself an *appui* in the last surviving heir of her family.

Lionel was much gratified by the favourable change in his mother's manner towards him, and he treated her with uniform respect and attention. When he brought her back to England after his brother's death, he told her "he hoped that she would continue to consider D'Arcy as her home;" and his feelings received a severe chill by her refusing to go there even as a visitor. She declared that "she could never again bear to enter a house where every object would remind her of her dear, lamented Edward." She seemed to forget that she had made up her mind to reside at D'Arcy for many years after her husband had expired within its walls.

Lord Delmore's affliction at the loss of his brother was as deep as it was possible for human nature to endure. He did not feel the blow less severely when it actually came because it had been long anticipated. He seemed

to himself to be left alone in the world; to be a solitary, deserted being, whose fate had ceased to be an object of peculiar interest to any one. With the exception of Charles Willoughby, he had no friends; and from him he was now so completely separated by a variety of circumstances, that it did not appear probable they would in future be thrown very frequently together, or that he would see so much of him as he ardently wished to do. He had little inclination to enter into general society. He now found numbers of people who were anxious to court his intimacy, and who crowded round him with declarations of friendship; but he knew the hollow heartlessness of such professions, and he was aware, that they were made not to himself, but to *Lord Delmore*:—he therefore repulsed them with the most petrifying coldness.

It soon began to be said, "that Lord Delmore was become extremely exclusive; that he was grown so insufferably proud, he would scarcely condescend to associate with anybody!" It was whispered, "that he had always been a very odd young man, that no one had ever known exactly what to make of him." Many of her acquaintance observed significantly, "that poor Lady Delmore had formerly been much

censured for the marked distinction she had made in the treatment of her two sons; but that appearances now seemed to justify her having done so, and that she might not have been the least to blame, after all." In short, our hero was universally declared to be a remarkably disagreeable person; and, though he was partly aware that such was the public opinion entertained of him, he despised those who disliked him too sincerely, to be concerned at their disapprobation.

Soon after he returned from abroad, Lionel went to pay a visit to his uncle, Lord Estonville, at his place in the country. He was anxious to see his cousin, Lady Agnes, and to communicate to her those melancholy farewell remembrances with which he had been entrusted by his brother.

The meeting was a sad one to them both; and Lady Agnes was much affected during the confidential interview that succeeded it. She had felt a sincere regard for Lord Delmore, whom she had taught herself to consider as her future husband, and whose amiable character she greatly admired; but they had seen so much of each other as children, that her affection for him rather resembled that of a sister towards a brother, than of a promise towards

the lover of her choice; and she consequently deplored his loss in grief, but not in brokenness of heart.

It was Lionel's intention to establish himself at D'Arcy, and thither he repaired to make the necessary arrangements for his future comfort. The house looked solitary and cheerless, yet he felt that it was only the more in accordance with the state of his own mind, and he had no inclination to leave it. His days were passed almost entirely alone, except when their uniformity was broken in upon by the presence of men of business. This was pretty frequently the case; for as his brother's health had not allowed him for a very long time to look into his own concerns, he left his affairs in a state of great perplexity, and a long arrear of troublesome business remained to be settled by his successor.

Lionel applied himself to this task with persevering assiduity; it afforded occupation for his leisure and his thoughts; and at length he began to consider almost as an amusement what had at first appeared the greatest of all possible annoyances.

Thus had he lingered on at D'Arcy from week to week and month to month, declining all invitations and shunning the society of his

neighbours, until he was unexpectedly tempted to emerge from his retirement by receiving a note from Mr. Wingfield, 'requesting the honour of his company the following week to meet his friend Captain Mordaunt and all the family from Mordaunt.'

CHAPTER V.

Haughty and beautiful! thy noble birth
Upon thy brow's smooth tablet may be read;
And thou with measured step dost walk the earth
As though its dust were honour'd by thy tread.

MRS. NORTON.

It may easily be imagined that, after Augusta Mordaunt returned home, her thoughts frequently wandered back to the recollection of the pleasant days she had spent at Mr. Wingfield's. She wondered how Lord Delmore was passing his time; she wondered if he often remembered her; and, above all, she wondered when, or if ever, he would accept her father's invitation, and come to visit them at Mordaunt?

She talked of him constantly to Edward when they were alone together; but though her brother never attempted to turn the conversation when she thus began it, it was evident that the subject was one he rather wished to avoid than to encourage.

The truth was, Edward had been at first very much pleased with Lord Delmore; but he had not afterwards felt quite satisfied with his conduct towards Augusta: he thought that he had spoken to her too much and too little; it had been apparent that his admiration was agreeable to her; and it therefore seemed to him that he ought not to have taken leave of her without saying something to set her mind at ease about his future intentions.

Mr. Mordaunt regretted that Lord Delmore had not proposed for his daughter, because his having actually done so would have secured her forming a connexion which he considered in every way brilliant and desirable, and would also have saved him all farther trouble about the matter. And Mrs. Mordaunt anxiously wished that his lordship had not delayed his declaration, because she could not help fearing that such delays were always more or less dangerous; and because she likewise perceived that Augusta's present happiness, at least, had been placed in some degree at stake.

When the Mordaunts came back from the north, they learned that their neighbours had come down to Estonville Castle during their absence. As the first people in the country, they had formerly wished to make their ac-

quaintance; and, as Lord Delmore's near relations, they were now still more desirous to cultivate it.

Lord and Lady Estonville's family consisted of two sons and three daughters. Lord Mortimer had been married some years; when that event first took place, he had been established at a distant estate of his father's, but he and his wife had latterly emigrated to the Continent. Philip, the younger brother, seemed never likely to be settled anywhere. He was a handsome, idle young man about town; very unprincipled, very profligate, and possessing the power of being very agreeable when he thought it worth his while. The two elder sisters, Lady Caroline and Lady Mary, were both strikingly beautiful. The latter, after coquetting with one admirer after another for several years, at length condescended to accept Mr. Carrington—a weak man with a large fortune, who allowed her to become a much more desperate flirt than she had even been before her marriage. Lady Agnes was considerably the youngest of the family. She was a pretty, pleasing girl—as different from her sisters in appearance as she was in mind and character.

Lord Estonville was a keen politician; and as he was aware that Mr. Mordaunt's politics

were the same as his own, he determined to secure the support which he would be able to give him as a person of large landed property in his county. He knew that Mr. Mordaunt had hitherto concerned himself very little about public affairs; he therefore hoped that, if he conciliated his friendship, he should obtain the command of his interest whenever he might desire its assistance. He signified to Lady Estonville that his new neighbour was a person with whom he particularly wished to be upon very good and friendly terms; he therefore requested that she and Caroline would show every possible civility to his wife and daughter.

Lady Estonville never disputed her lord's commands, and in this instance she felt no inclination to do so. She was an indolent fine lady; and she had heard enough of Mrs. Mordaunt's character and habits, to think she should find *her* a companion much more congenial to her taste than any of the ladies she had hitherto been recommended to notice in a similar way in the country.

Lady Caroline had never bestowed a thought upon the present inhabitants of Mordaunt before they came to reside there. She had, indeed, known Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt by sight, from meeting them constantly in London;

and had casually remarked that the former was a very good-looking man, and the latter a very well-dressed woman. She now felt curious to inquire more about them; and if her father was desirous to cultivate an intimacy with Mr. Mordaunt, she had also her own reasons for wishing to establish a friendship with his daughter.

No time was lost in preliminaries. When Mrs. Mordaunt and Augusta came in one morning from a drive, they found Lord and Lady Estonville's, and Lady Caroline Mortimer's, cards upon their table, accompanied by a note of invitation to spend some days in the following week at Estonville Castle.

"I am so rejoiced that they have asked us to go there!" said Augusta to Edward, "I want of all things to know the Lady Mortimers. I dare say they are very nice girls."

Her brother smiled as he replied, "Lady Agnes was to have married the late Lord Delmore, was she not?"

"Yes, poor thing! I once heard the present Lord Delmore mention her with great interest and affection. He told me, at the same time, that Lady Caroline was far the handsomest of his cousins."

It was late in the afternoon when the party

from Mordaunt arrived at Estonville Castle. They found the earl at home to receive them, and the countess's *abord* was very flatteringly gracious. Lady Caroline advanced towards Augusta, and told her, with a most bewitching smile, how very happy she was to make her acquaintance.

"I hope," added she, "that we shall become great friends. I cannot regret that my sister Agnes is at present staying with my aunt Lady Delmore; for, if she had been here, I could not of course have expected to have had you entirely to myself."

Augusta was extremely gratified by the kindness of Lady Caroline's manner, and the warmth of her expressions. She felt sorry that she should not see Lady Agnes; and when she heard Lady Delmore's name, she was painfully aware that she blushed.

Her companion did not seem to notice this circumstance; she continued talking very agreeably, and before the ladies went up to dress, Miss Mordaunt had learned to believe that nobody in the world was ever half so fascinating and delightful as Lady Caroline Mortimer.

In forming this opinion, two-thirds of Lady Caroline's acquaintance might have told Augusta she had not been singular; for her lady-

ship possessed to a very extraordinary degree the art of captivating the fancy of those persons with whom she desired to ingratiate herself.

Her great natural quickness and perfect knowledge of the world gave her a ready insight into the characters and views of others; and such was the activity of her spirit, that she was always either entangled in an old flirtation, engaged in arranging a new matrimonial scheme, or occupied in promoting some other favourite object of her own. She liked universal admiration, and never entirely discouraged any one of the numberless aspirants for her favour who constantly crowded around her. Her ideas were too worldly, and her temper was too ambitious, to allow her for an instant to contemplate the possibility of marrying any man whom she did not consider in every respect a suitable and eligible *parti*. And the same feelings taught her to think that nobody who possessed all the qualifications of rank and fortune which she looked upon as requisite in a husband, ought in wisdom to be refused.

The happy suppliant who could boast that his situation united the manifold advantages she expected in the object of her choice, had not yet presented himself; but, in spite of her

return her preference, and to unite his
with hers.

Her ladyship had arrived at the age of
and-twenty; and, though her mirror told
that she was still as handsome as ever she
been, she could not help feeling that she
no longer quite in her *première jeunesse;*
that, if she intended to marry at all, it was
time she should begin to think seriously
the subject.

Lady Caroline was extremely accomplis
and her conversation, without being peda
impressed those who heard it with a vivid
of the superiority of her talents. She spo
music as a person who thoroughly under
the science herself, and who was also well
to discriminate the merit of the performan
others. She talked of drawing like an a
and was perfectly acquainted with the pec
style and excellences of all the celeb
masters in the different schools of pain
Though she had never been abroad, she

elegance of a native. She seldom conversed upon politics, yet she contrived to inform herself of the general outline and tendency of every political question of importance; and thus the few words she occasionally said upon such subjects, led others to believe that she had studied them much more deeply than was really the case. In all matters of dress and taste she was appealed to as an oracle; while, in the public chit-chat and private gossip of the day, nobody was considered to be half so well and accurately informed.

If Augusta Mordaunt had thought Lady Caroline Mortimer beautiful when she was first introduced to her, muffled up as she then was in an immense shawl, and shaded by a very large bonnet; how much was her admiration of her increased when she made her appearance before dinner!

Her tall, majestic form was set off to great advantage by a velvet gown of the simplest fashion, fitted closely to her figure. Her glossy black hair was parted across her fine forehead, and fell in graceful ringlets on each side of her face; while a jewel-comb and earrings, the only ornaments she wore, were almost eclipsed in brilliancy by the sparkling animation of her large black eyes.

The party was rather a large one. Augusta's neighbour at dinner was a little man, whose appearance amused her, and who favoured her with plenty of conversation of his own peculiar description. The place on the other side of her remained vacant until it was unexpectedly occupied by a young man who carelessly sauntered into the room when the first course was nearly concluded. His entrance seemed to cause no surprise, — neither Lord nor Lady Estonville took the least notice of him; he seated himself without speaking to anybody, and, calling up one of the servants, desired him to bring back the soup, which had been removed from the table. His appetite appeared to be excellent, and, though he had not taken the trouble of being ready by the appointed hour, it was evident that he was determined not to lose any part of his dinner. At length he turned to Augusta, whose presence he had before scarcely condescended to remark, and, without addressing her by her name, asked her if she would drink a glass of wine with him.

Miss Mordaunt thought him very odd and very insolent, and, after she had assented to his request, not another word passed between them. She longed to inquire of her talkative

acquaintance who this strange person was? but she was afraid to do so, lest he should overhear her question.

As soon as the ladies retired from table, Lady Caroline led Augusta to a sofa which was placed in a sort of recess formed by the deep embrasure of an old-fashioned window at one end of the drawing-room, far distant from the place where her mother and the rest of the company usually established themselves.

"Let us sit down here," said her ladyship to her companion; "this is always my favourite corner when I have anybody with me I like to talk to."

"It looks indeed most comfortable," replied Augusta, seating herself beside her new friend; who observed,

"I am afraid you found my brother Philip a very stupid neighbour at dinner. This seemed to be one of his silent days."

"Was that gentleman Mr. Mortimer?" exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, with great surprise. "Yet," continued she, after a moment's reflection, "I might have guessed who he was, from his strong likeness to you, Lady Caroline."

Her ladyship smiled as she answered, "Many people reckon me extremely like Philip, and I am always pleased to be told that I am so; for

he is my favourite brother and great ally. But what did you think of your other companion?"

"I found no reason to complain of *his* being too silent," said Augusta, laughing.

"No, poor man! with him the deficiency is not in the *quantity* but in the *quality* of his discourse. Mr. Twiston is, however, a very diverting animal in his way; and it would be excessively ungrateful in me if I did not admire him, for he is constantly insinuating to me that he is one of the humblest as well as the most devoted of my *adorateurs*. I really do believe that he would never have made the prodigious exertion of travelling thus far into the country, just at present, for any other consideration than to 'enjoy the felicity,' as he poetically expresses it, 'of finding himself within the influence of the sunshine of *mes beaux yeux*.'"

Augusta was extremely amused. "The description you have given me of Mr. Twiston," she remarked, "is so delightful, that I quite envy you the admiration of such an entertaining person; and I feel more than half tempted to be guilty of the great presumption of trying to rival you in the affections of this attractive and sentimental squire of dames."

Lady Caroline's countenance assumed for an

meant a very peculiar expression as she slowly repeated,

"You intend to rival me, do you?" Then, in a tone half sportive and half serious, she added, "I give you leave to make the experiment, *ma belle;* but, lovely and interesting as you are, I warn you that it will not prove successful. Believe me, I have long and deeply studied the character of my fanciful hero; I am well acquainted with all its weak and vulnerable points, and no young lady living — not even *you*, shall steal from me such an invaluable prize as the tiny heart of—Mr. Twiston. Now, pray do not put on so grave a face about so *trifling* a subject, (the pun, if you think it one, was unintentional.) I never knew the little man we were talking of make anybody look serious before."

Augusta felt reassured by these last words of encouragement; her eloquent features had previously betrayed that she feared she had offended Lady Caroline by what she had intended to be merely a harmless *plaisanterie.*

"We have descanted quite long enough," continued her ladyship gaily, "upon my ridiculous friend; I have pointed out his merits, and the topic is growing rather threadbare.

I want to speak to you about a very different sort of person, one whose good qualities are not properly appreciated by the world in general, and whom I am therefore very anxious seriously to recommend to *your* particular approbation. I will not now attempt to describe to you his character, since you will very soon have an opportunity of judging of him for yourself; and if you meet him without prejudice, I am convinced you will have the good taste to like him." She paused. "The person I allude to, and who is coming here to-morrow, — is my cousin, Lord Delmore."

Lady Caroline fixed her eyes upon Miss Mordaunt as she made this communication. The effect it produced was electrical: poor Augusta's throat, face, her very brow, became crimson; she bent her looks upon the ground, and her lip quivered with emotion. Her companion's penetrating glance seemed now riveted upon her with a keener scrutiny than before, and the consciousness of this circumstance naturally increased her confusion and distress.

"What can be the matter with you, my dear Miss Mordaunt?" exclaimed her ladyship, in a voice of real or affected alarm. "Do tell me, I entreat you, what it is? You surely must be ill."

"No, no," replied Augusta, scarcely knowing what she said, or how to frame a plausible excuse for the emotion she had been unable to conceal. "Thank you, I am quite well. It was a sudden sort of heat—an oppression, that came over me; but it is almost gone now."

"You do indeed look better: your appearance positively frightened me a minute ago. Are you subject to these kind of attacks?"

This question augmented Augusta's embarrassment, and she stammered out,

"I suppose I must have looked much worse than I felt,—for I really cannot dignify my uncomfortable faintness by the name of an attack. I am vexed with myself for having alarmed you, and therefore the greatest favour you can do me is to say and think no more of what has just passed."

Lady Caroline placed her hand across her eyes for a few moments; then raising her head, and turning towards Augusta with a look of mingled kindness and intelligence, she said to her,

"I am quite shocked to think what a fool I have been; but I hope you will forgive me for having unintentionally distressed you. A sudden recollection has revealed to me the whole truth. Your secret is perfectly safe with me;

and, believe me, the discovery I have now accidentally made, can only redouble the lively interest and affection I had previously begun to entertain for you."

Miss Mordaunt's dismay and astonishment were very evident, as she replied,

"There must be some strange mistake: I do not understand what you can possibly mean."

"Then you must allow me to explain myself more clearly. When I first spoke to you of Lord Delmore, I had entirely forgotten a report which a certain little bird whispered in my ear a short time ago.—There is no occasion for that guilty blush, except to confirm the truth of my story.—My oracle informed me that Lionel had been at the Doncaster races; that he had there met a beautiful and charming young lady whom every one admired, and that he had fallen desperately in love. I was aware that his heart had hitherto been found so impenetrable, that I attached but little importance to what I heard. The object of his supposed adoration was then unknown, and consequently indifferent to me; in short, the whole thing escaped my memory. In what an altered point of view does it appear to me now! My poor cousin will at length be a fortunate man; and the warm interest I have always taken in his

happiness will not in future be confined to himself alone."

Augusta was so completely confounded by this direct accusation, that she was for some time unable to make Lady Caroline any answer. She admitted that she had met Lord Delmore at Mr. Wingfield's, and that, as a friend of her brother's, she had become sooner and better acquainted with *him* than with other people: but she would not plead guilty to the charge of his having fallen in love with her, or having inspired her with any tender preference in return.

"My dear," pursued her tormentor, "you are perhaps too young and inexperienced to understand such matters yourself; the fact was pretty notorious to others, and, I dare say, to nobody more so than to Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt. You need not appear so very miserable because *I* happen to have learned a little earlier, from the observation of my neighbours, what I should certainly have discovered for myself the very first time I saw you and Lionel together. I rather pique myself upon my penetration in everything relating to an *affaire du cœur*—it rarely fails me; and many are the interesting confidences I have had made to me upon subjects of this kind. My friends have an idea

that my advice may be of service to them, and they know that they may safely trust me. Upon one point you may set your mind perfectly at rest:—you will find me very discreet. I may perhaps speak to you frequently of my cousin in private, as I have done now; but I promise you that in public, or indeed in the hearing of a third person, I shall carefully avoid addressing any observations about Lord Delmore particularly to *you*."

Augusta gave Lady Caroline full credit for being very kind and very sincere; yet she could not help feeling extremely unhappy at learning that a stranger was in possession of a secret she had hitherto believed unknown to all the world, and which she had even endeavoured partially to conceal from herself. She was vexed and humiliated; she had nothing to disclose, and at all events she would have had little inclination to communicate her private concerns, and to profit by the indirect permission she had received to seek for counsel and guidance from a person to whom she had only been introduced for the first time a few hours before. She merely thanked her *soi-disant* friend very gratefully for all her goodness, but again assured her that she was mistaken in her conjectures.

Her ladyship contrived however, in the course of the conversation, to worm out everything she wished to know — to ascertain exactly upon what footing Augusta and Lord Delmore had parted, and to satisfy herself that no explanation of their mutual sentiments had taken place between them.

CHAPTER VI.

Hermia.—Why are you grown so rude? what change is this?

* * * * *

Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander?
I am as fair now as I was erewhile."

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN Augusta Mordaunt retired to her room, she was distracted by so many contending feelings, that she found it impossible to sleep. She was angry with herself, and bitterly lamented her own folly in having betrayed, by her confusion, that which a little self-possession might have enabled her to conceal. She perceived the necessity of being more upon her guard in future; and she determined that her treacherous countenance should not a second time reveal what was passing in her mind. But, as she formed this resolution, she sighed at the consciousness of having formed it too late.

"And do I really love Lord Delmore?" murmured she, as a new train of thought presented itself to her troubled imagination.

This was a question she had never ventured to ask herself before, and she now felt that she could only answer it in the affirmative. A veil seemed suddenly withdrawn from her eyes, and it frightened her to gaze upon the truth. One uneasy and alarming reflection followed another in quick succession, and she sought in vain for a ray of comfort to cheer and console her.

She was both astonished and distressed to think that Lord Delmore's behaviour at Doncaster had attracted so much attention. She became painfully sensible how awkward she should feel whenever she happened to be next thrown into the society of any of those persons she had met there, and to whom her future prospects had consequently been a subject of curiosity and speculation. And, as she contrasted her former blissful ignorance with her present uneasy knowledge, she ardently wished that she could be gifted with the power of forgetting all that had that evening been revealed to her.

The prospect of Lord Delmore's arrival would have given her great pleasure before her conversation with Lady Caroline; but she now looked forward to it with anxiety and dread. She had never felt convinced that he was attached to her; she trembled at the probability

of his having heard the report that had just been communicated to herself; she had a sad foreboding that he would meet her with coldness, that his manner towards her would be altered. Her pride told her that she could in time learn to bear all this; but she was not quite sure that she should at first be able to carry off her mortification with apparent indifference.

She apprehended that everybody at Estonville Castle would watch her behaviour when she saw him: if he spoke to her, she imagined it would be remarked by all the party; and she felt that she should no longer find it possible to answer him with her accustomed ease. Most of all, she dreaded being subjected to the keen and certain scrutiny of kind Lady Caroline's observation.

In spite of all Augusta's wise resolutions, her looks showed, when she came down to breakfast the next morning, that she had spent a restless night. Mrs. Mordaunt regarded her with anxiety; she was too intimately acquainted with every turn of her daughter's features, not to be aware from their expression, that something must have occurred to ruffle her spirits. She was far from being satisfied by her assurances that she was not ill, and she

possessed no means of ascertaining what was really the matter with her.

"Have you received any letters to-day, *belle Auguste?*" inquired Lady Caroline when she rose from breakfast, examining her young guest as she spoke with a glance of mingled curiosity and intelligence.

"No," replied Miss Mordaunt; "I have so few correspondents, that I seldom expect any."

"Then," said her ladyship, "you are certainly gifted with the talent of divination: your pale cheek and sad brow clearly prove that you must be aware we are not to see Lionel this afternoon. He has written to my father, to tell him he has been detained at home by business longer than he anticipated, and that consequently he shall not be with us till the day after to-morrow. Had I understood the *carte du pays* a little sooner, and despatched him with cousinly affection a gentle hint whom he was to meet here this week, I have no doubt he would either have contrived to finish the tiresome business he speaks of more expeditiously, or have discovered that he might transact it just as well by proxy."

On hearing this announcement, Augusta's first sensation was that of disappointment; but

it was only momentary—she could not help feeling it a relief that Lord Delmore's arrival was deferred. She was still in an excited, uncomfortable state, and the delay of two days would give the fever upon her spirits time to subside, and allow her manner to resume its usual unconcern before she saw him. She also thought that she should then feel perhaps less in awe of Lady Caroline.

Her ladyship did not allow her to indulge her reflections many minutes without interruption.

"Though the most interesting member of our party," she observed, "is prevented from joining us, I must endeavour to amuse you as well as I can in his absence. We expect some additions to our society to-day in the persons of Mrs. Carewell and her daughter. Miss Carewell is *charming!*" (she laid a strong emphasis upon the last word,) "and if I praise *her*, she returns me the compliment with interest; for she talks in raptures, I am told, to all her acquaintance of her dear delightful friend *Caroline Mortimer.*"

"Is Miss Carewell handsome?"

"By no means. She has a tall, gaunt figure, coarse black hair, and dark heavy eyes. But it is unnecessary to describe her appearance

more minutely, for she tells everybody that she is extremely like me."

"How much I shall admire her!" exclaimed Augusta, laughing.

"That is really very prettily said," continued Lady Caroline. "When my resemblance perceives that you are rather a favourite of mine, I think you may reasonably flatter yourself that, from affection for me and sympathy in all my tastes, she will be well inclined to extend some portion of her friendship and protection to you."

"If she honours me so far, I hope I shall be properly grateful to her. I suppose she is very young?"

"I do not exactly know what *you* may call *very young*. Miss Carewell has decidedly seen her thirtieth birthday,—and, if I am not very much mistaken, at least some five or six more birthdays since. She is, however, *très-bien conservée*, and her dress and manners are as juvenile as heart can wish."

"But, with all these charms, how does it happen that she remains unmarried?"

"We must, I fear, attribute that circumstance to the bad taste of the gentlemen of the present age; for I am not aware of her having ever been cruel enough to reject a proposal, or

to frown away an admirer. She first came out, as I have heard — for I will not pretend to remember her at that time,—as a lively, romping country belle. She rode and walked, and danced and talked, most indefatigably for several years; but finding at length that this style did not succeed, and was moreover reckoned rather vulgar, she determined to change her manner, take up a higher position, and come forward in a new character. She chanced to have spent a few months with a relation in town—in the City, I believe; and it was during this visit that she fancied herself metamorphosed into a London fine lady. When she returned home, she could talk of nothing but the opera, the play, and Kensington-gardens. She despised her former neighbours and friends; she grew languid and sentimental, and she addicted herself to reading romances. I had the pleasure of making her acquaintance while the sentimental fit was strongly upon her. She declared herself enchanted with me; and in so saying I suppose she was sincere, for she immediately took me as her model. She imitated my air, my voice, my way of talking; she copied the shape of my gowns, and the fashion of my *coiffure*: in short, whenever we meet, I have the gratification of fancying that

I see myself reflected in Miss Carewell. She goes occasionally for a week or two to her relation in London; which sounds very well, and furnishes her with fashionable subjects of conversation when she comes back again. But I suspect that she prides herself still more upon her annual visits here, and her boasted intimacy with me and with all the Estonville family."

"Poor Miss Carewell!" said Philip Mortimer, who joined the young ladies before his sister had concluded her last sentence: "I am sure that we *are* all very fond of her. I have made love to her regularly every year since I left Eton, and as we both grow older I think she only likes me better and better. Does she not, Car?"

Then addressing himself more particularly to Augusta, he added, "You will find Caroline very capable, Miss Mordaunt, of describing to you all the eccentricities of our tigers; but, in justice to the poor animals, I must warn you that she was always gifted with a keen perception of the ridiculous. She has a trick, too, of amusing herself by pointing out the faults and foibles of her neighbours. I hope she has not been treacherous enough to furnish you with a catalogue of mine."

"That would have been taking unnecessary trouble, Philip," replied her ladyship with a playful smile; "for if Miss Mordaunt sees much of *you*, she will soon discover them without my assistance."

The morning passed very pleasantly. Augusta had said that she liked flowers; and Lady Caroline proposed that the whole party should walk to the garden and the new conservatory, both of which were well worth seeing. She was in high spirits herself, and particularly agreeable. No farther allusions were made to Lord Delmore; the conversation became general and animated, and even Philip Mortimer condescended occasionally to join in it, and to be extremely entertaining.

Miss Mordaunt (who was leaning upon Lady Caroline's arm) was much amused by listening to the high-flown compliments that Mr. Twiston paid to her companion, and still more so by remarking the ingenious way in which her ladyship contrived to lead him on to say ridiculous things, and the comic civility with which she received them. Her brother, she thought, had not spoken too severely when he accused her of being satirical. But she was not a little flattered by observing that while she indulged her wit at the expense of most other people,

she uniformly spared *her;* and in the simplicity of her heart she wondered what could make Lady Caroline so fond of her.

When Miss Carewell arrived, Augusta found that the picture which had been drawn of her was by no means a caricature. She looked older and plainer than she had expected to see her; and the raptures she expressed at meeting her 'beloved friend,'—the pains she had evidently taken to make herself appear like her, and her unremitting endeavours to imitate every word and action of Lady Caroline's,—were truly ludicrous. But when Mr. Mortimer advanced carelessly towards her, and pretended to mistake her for his sister, Augusta had great difficulty in maintaining her gravity.

Meanwhile Miss Carewell had been scanning our heroine with much curiosity from head to foot. She came up to her after dinner, and said in an encouraging tone,

"Miss Mordaunt, dear Lady Caroline has been telling me you are such a charming person, that I am quite impatient to become better acquainted with you. I never had the pleasure of knowing Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt, though I have seen them frequently in town. You have not yet been introduced in London, I understand?"

"No," interrupted Lady Caroline; "she is quite a novice in the ways of the world. You and I ought really to undertake the office of initiating her into the secrets of London society, Miss Carewell."

Miss Carewell simpered. "I could not presume," she replied, "to instruct any one in *your* presence; but if *you* will kindly perform the task you propose, Miss Mordaunt will indeed be happy in having such a guide."

"Oh, you must not learn to flatter me. Mr. Twiston assures me every hour of the day that I am quite perfect. I really begin to suspect that my friends have formed a conspiracy to endeavour to turn my head, or at least to make me believe that everybody who takes pattern by me must infallibly become delightful."

Miss Carewell looked confused; she reddened, and appeared to entertain an uncomfortable suspicion that her dear friend was turning her into ridicule. At that moment Mr. Twiston approached the table where the ladies were sitting, and requested they would admit him into their society.

"Such an addition," said Lady Caroline, with one of her equivocal smiles, "must always be welcome in any party; so, pray take that vacant chair; and now charitably exert

your eloquence in making my peace with Miss Carewell, who seems foolish enough to be very angry with me for some nonsensical words of mine which were spoken at random, and with no intention of offending her."

Mr. Twiston pronounced it absolutely impossible that anybody could be offended with Lady Caroline Mortimer; and added, that Miss Carewell was the very last person in the world whom he should have expected to hear accused of being so.

The lady herself protested that she had never felt less inclined to be angry in her life. She could not imagine why Lady Caroline had supposed she appeared affronted: it must have been in joke that she had pretended to think she was! And after making many similar sort of declarations, she changed the subject by asking Mr. Twiston to write some verses for her in her beautiful new album.

"I should be most happy to comply with so flattering a request," answered he, modestly shrugging his shoulders, "if I felt qualified to do so; but really I am a miserable poet. My poor compositions would be a disgrace to your book."

"Hush, Mr. Twiston!" exclaimed Lady Caroline, "I positively cannot allow you to

undervalue your poetical talents in this way. Miss Carewell has seen them, or I should feel much tempted to beg you to repeat to her those charming lines you were so kind as to write for *my* book."

The poor little man blushed and languished, and ventured to observe that he thought he certainly had felt a happy inspiration upon that occasion.

"And so you will feel again now, at Miss Carewell's command," pursued her ladyship: "there are pens, ink, and paper; you have only to fancy yourself Apollo, and here are we —the three Graces—waiting to admire the effusions of your genius."

"The verses he writes," whispered she to Augusta, "bad as they may be, will, I have no doubt, be quite as good as any that ever have been composed for my friend's album."

Mr. Twiston, however, gave her no opportunity of judging of their comparative merit at the present moment, for he declared it was perfectly out of the question to compose anything in public. He promised to make the attempt in private at some future time.

Greatly as Augusta had been diverted by the whole of this scene, she could not help feeling rather shocked by Lady Caroline's free indul-

gence of her propensity for ridicule. The persons upon whom she had exercised it were absurd enough, to be sure; but she called them her friends, they were under her father's roof, and there was something both treacherous and unkind in drawing forth their weaknesses, and then laughing at them before their faces.

"I am not sure," thought she, "if it was right to be amused at the expense of others; for I should have been very much distressed if I had perceived that she had acted in the same way by me. And, after all, how can I tell that when I have left this place I may not be made the sport of her wit, and be brought forward in my turn to entertain the next visitors who happen to arrive here?"

The day on which Lord Delmore was expected at Estonville, Lady Caroline had asked Miss Mordaunt to take a long drive with her in her pony-carriage. It chanced that the message she sent to order the carriage was never delivered, and consequently it did not come round to the door at the appointed hour. The inquiry and explanation occasioned by this unfortunate mistake occupied some time, and thus the afternoon was far advanced when they set out. The place they went to see was several miles distant, and, before they got half-

way back, the shadows had begun to lengthen considerably. Lady Caroline became uneasy; she whipped her pony, but it seemed to care very little for her impatience, and she could not persuade it to quicken its pace. When they reached the gate at Estonville, they met Mr. Mortimer, who was returning from the stables.

"Are we very late?" inquired his sister, in a voice of anxiety.

"I really do not know," replied he; "I should think not *very*. What has put you in such a fuss, Car? Has the pony misbehaved?"

"No, no; I was only afraid we should be hurried to death in our dressing."

"Is that all? Well then," pulling out his watch, "you may take comfort, for I believe Gateau will allow you a good half-hour for your toilet. Delmore has been arrived an age."

"How provoking!" muttered Lady Caroline below her breath, but loud enough to be audible to one of her companions.

"I suppose," continued Philip, "that he intends to pay us a long, comfortable visit this time, for he has actually brought his horses.

I have just been to inspect his cavalry, and more beautiful animals I never saw."

Lady Caroline made no answer; she drew Augusta's arm within hers, and hurried her towards the house. Philip accompanied them.

"Car always accuses me," said he, "of taking twice as much time in dressing as she does, or any young lady of her acquaintance. To-day we shall start fair, and we shall see which of us will win the race."

The person to whom they were addressed paid little attention to these words. She had perceived that the gentlemen were still standing round the fireplace in the great hall, and in the centre of the assembled group she had found no difficulty in distinguishing Lord Delmore's figure. He started when he heard the entrance-door opened, and advanced immediately to greet his cousins.

"My dearest Lionel, how delighted I am to see you!" exclaimed Lady Caroline, as she shook hands with him most affectionately. Then drawing forward Augusta, who had hung timidly in the background, she added, "I believe it is unnecessary to introduce you to my companion."

"I have indeed the pleasure of knowing

Miss Mordaunt extremely well," replied his lordship; and something more he said in an under-tone to Augusta herself, about feeling rejoiced to meet her.

"Delmore is much improved in gallantry of late," observed Mr. Mortimer, in a sort of soliloquy. "He is so engrossed by his attentions to the young ladies, that he has quite overlooked me."

"I beg your pardon, Philip," answered his cousin, as he extended his hand towards him; "I really did not perceive you until this moment."

After what Augusta had previously heard Mr. Mortimer say about the young peer's arrival, she was surprised to find that he had not seen him before. In Lord Delmore's manner to her, an indifferent, or even an interested person, would have been unable to trace the slightest alteration; but to herself it appeared a little,—a very little,—less cordial than it had been formerly. It struck her that it was slightly tinctured with displeasure. Certain it was that his eyes followed the two young ladies, as they walked up stairs together, with a melancholy expression; but a physiognomist would have pronounced that he looked at them in sorrow rather than in anger.

When Augusta went into her mother's room, she found her in a state of considerable uneasiness. Mrs. Mordaunt had fancied, from the unusual length of her daughter's absence, that some accident must have happened; and had blamed herself severely for having allowed her to accompany Lady Caroline in her pony carriage. When she learned, however, that her apprehensions were unfounded, she was much inclined to be angry with Miss Mordaunt for not having returned sooner.

"It is really too provoking of you, Augusta," she remarked, "to have stayed out so very late to-day; everybody else came in early. Lord Delmore was here at four o'clock, and had been inquiring what had become of you for at least two hours before I left the party down stairs. You look tired to death; the damp of the evening has taken your hair quite out of curl, and you have only left yourself five minutes for dressing-time. You will be a terrible figure."

Mrs. Mordaunt did not often scold her daughter; her reproofs were, therefore, felt by her the more severely. Upon this occasion, poor Augusta was very much disposed to burst into tears; she commanded her feelings, how-

ever, and set about the business of her toilet with the greatest possible expedition.

In spite of all her endeavours to despatch it hastily, a considerable time elapsed before it was completed; and when she and her mother proceeded to the drawing-room, they found the whole party already assembled there. Lord Delmore was engaged in earnest conversation with Lady Caroline, who raised her eyes and looked significantly towards the two ladies as they entered: Augusta well knew by her ladyship's manner that *she* was the person she was at that moment talking of.

"Miss Mordaunt," said Philip Mortimer, who had for once in his life surprised his friends by being in time for dinner, "I think I may boast that I am the winner of our race, since I certainly came in first. I beat my sister Caroline hollow, and I believe I may venture to add that I have distanced you."

"You may indeed," replied Augusta; "I feel quite ashamed of myself for being the last to appear."

He continued to occupy her attention with this sort of badinage till the dinner was announced; he sat next to her at table (as he usually did), and then it was that he exerted

satisfy Augusta's mind; and, even during those moments when she found Mr. Mortimer's conversation the most amusing, she could not help secretly wishing that he had happened to be in one of his silent moods.

She trusted that Miss Carewell would fix herself, (as she generally did,) upon Lady Caroline in the evening; for, under her present circumstances, she much dreaded a *tête-à-tête* with her ladyship; and in this expectation she was not disappointed. No sooner was the damsel in question established beside her friend, than she remarked in a very sentimental voice,

"What a pity it is that poor Lord Delmore cannot recover his spirits! I really think he looks more depressed than he did when I met him here before. Attached as he was to his brother, I cannot help always suspecting that there must be something more concealed under that deep melancholy than grief for the loss of a near and dear relation. A *passion malheureuse*, perhaps. Why will not *you* be charitable enough to console him, Lady Caroline?"

In spite of her ladyship's habitual self-command, a bright blush crimsoned for an instant her beautiful cheek: she recovered herself, however, with the rapidity of lightning, and exclaimed,

"*I* try to console him! Oh no—that would not do at all. You never were more mistaken in your conjectures. Lord Delmore has known many sorrows, but you may spare your present pity, for I believe I can assure you that he is not suffering from the pangs of unrequited love."

Every word that had been spoken had sunk heavily into Augusta's heart. A new light broke painfully upon her. How was it possible she had never before guessed that Lord Delmore either was or had been attached to his charming cousin?

Lady Caroline seemed to divine what was passing in her thoughts; she turned to Miss Carewell, who looked half ashamed of what she had said, and asked carelessly, "In which volume of the Annual Register was it that Mrs. Carewell told me I should find the story she alluded to this morning?"

"I really do not recollect, but I will go to her and inquire immediately." And she rose for that purpose.

"I am sorry to give you so much trouble," observed Lady Caroline aloud: then, in a lower voice, she added, "Yet my question was devised with the express intention of getting rid of her. I could bear to listen to her impertinent non-

sense no longer. Besides, I remarked that you were annoyed by it. Poor woman! when she hazarded her opinions and advice, how little was she acquainted with the *carte du pays!* But, my dear cousin elect, what were you and Philip talking of with so much animation at dinner? Lionel looked almost inclined to be jealous."

"I should not have supposed," replied Augusta, dryly, "that Lord Delmore would have taken the trouble of observing *me*."

"Should you not indeed!" continued Lady Caroline, imitating her voice and manner. Then, speaking naturally, she added, "I feel too sincere an interest in your concerns to be deceived by this sort of evasion.—But here comes Lionel to plead for himself."

Augusta's heart beat violently when she saw Lord Delmore advancing towards her; he stopped irresolutely a few paces from the spot where she and her companion were sitting, and seemed as if he had not quite determined whether he should go up and speak to her or not.

"We have room for you here upon the sofa, Lionel," said Lady Caroline; but his lordship affected not to hear this summons—at least he took no notice of it.

Augusta turned away her head, to conceal her anger and mortification.

"If Delmore will not condescend to accept your invitation, Car, *I* will," remarked Mr. Mortimer, carelessly establishing himself in the vacant place upon the sofa, between his sister and Miss Mordaunt.

"I am not sure that I want *your* company, Philip," replied the former, playfully.

"I cannot help that," rejoined he; "I am very comfortable, and here I intend to remain, unless Miss Mordaunt is cruel enough to desire me to go away."

Augusta would gladly have done so, had she dared. Her distress was painfully evident, but Mr. Mortimer did not appear to perceive it; and he attempted to amuse her with one anecdote after another, until her answers to his observations betrayed at length such extraordinary absence of mind, that he had not patience to prolong the conversation, and he asked her if she would play at écarté with him?

She was ashamed to refuse; and having once begun to play, game succeeded game, because she did not know how to tell her companion that she was tired of écarté.

The evening seemed to her to be perfectly

interminable, and she was inexpressibly relieved when Lady Estonville at last proposed that the ladies should retire.

It is natural to inquire how Lord Delmore had been employed all this time. He had neither played at cards, nor had he spoken to any one. He had taken up a book, and though he pretended to read, his cousin remarked that he never turned over the leaves, and that his whole attention was riveted upon Miss Mordaunt's behaviour. She made no second attempt to draw him near her, but amused herself by conversing with the other gentlemen of the party.

As Lady Caroline passed close to her brother when she was leaving the room, he contrived to whisper in her ear, "Well, Car, I think I have done what you desired me to do; and it has been at the expense of much exertion and some personal mortification upon my part."

"Thank you, dear Philip," replied Lady Caroline; "you have indeed, and done it well. As for the rest, I pitied you, but that is all over now. Good night! More pleasing dreams attend *you*, than I suspect will fall to the share of some other people!"

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Page.—Better a little chiding, than a great deal of heart-break.

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN Mrs. Mordaunt reached her own room, after the scene which has been described in the preceding chapter, she informed her daughter that she had something to say to her before she went to bed. She told her maid, who was sitting up for her, that if she had put out all her things, she should require nothing more of her that night; and she added, that Miss Mordaunt would likewise undress herself. During this brief explanation, Augusta stood silent and trembling. She looked a picture of misery, and waited like a self-condemned culprit to hear the promised lecture.

As soon as the maid had closed the door after her departure, her mother thus addressed her:

"Augusta, I am going to speak to you very

seriously. You know that it always gives me pain to reprove you, and that I only do so when I consider it will be for your own good. You must remember that, before we came here, I described to you Mr. Mortimer's character, and particularly cautioned you not to allow yourself upon any account to be led on to flirt with a young man, whose attentions, however agreeable you might find them at the moment, would certainly prove a great disadvantage to you hereafter. I did not then consider it necessary to hint to you the expectations I had formed in consequence of Lord Delmore's behaviour at Mr. Wingfield's. I imagined you had appeared gratified by the preference he showed for you, and I flattered myself you had good sense enough to appreciate the advantages of an alliance in every way so desirable. Your conduct to-day has grievously disappointed all my hopes, and I trust it may not have prejudiced you in Lord Delmore's opinion for ever. What can he have thought of your having completely cut *him* the whole evening? and, still worse, for the purpose of flirting exclusively with his unprincipled cousin."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Augusta, weeping bitterly, "what a dreadful picture you have drawn me of myself! I do not deserve that

Lord Delmore should ever speak to me again. He must consider me most thoroughly heartless and contemptible! Yet," continued she after a pause, "I am not, I assure you, quite so much—so wilfully to blame as I fear you believe me; for it was against my own inclination that I talked longer and more to Mr. Mortimer to-day than to anybody else. I could not help speaking to him at dinner, when all his conversation was addressed to me. I wished he had not sat by me in the evening; Lady Caroline gave him a broad hint that she did not want his company upon the sofa, but he refused to take it; and when he established himself between us, and begged me not to drive him away, I thought I could not possibly do so rude a thing as to get up and leave my place. When he afterwards asked me to play at écarté with him, I would have given the world to have declined, but I could not invent any excuse; particularly as I have played almost every night with other people. I felt that I was doing wrong, and it made me very uncomfortable and wretched."

Mrs. Mordaunt considered for some moments, and at length she replied: "You were certainly placed in awkward and difficult circumstances; and, young and inexperienced as you are, it was

not perhaps surprising that you did not know how to extricate yourself from your embarrassment. But let what has unfortunately occurred this evening, prove a salutary warning to you for the future. You admit you were aware that it was not right to talk so much to Mr. Mortimer, and yet you had the weakness to continue doing so. With such a conviction upon your mind, you ought at all events to have broken off the conversation; and it would have been possible to accomplish this in fifty ways without the least apparent incivility. Nothing can be so detrimental to a girl as to make herself remarkable by encouraging a set of idle danglers. When there is any beneficial result to be expected from peculiar attentions, the case becomes widely different. My poor mother used always to impress upon my mind when I was of your age, how little it was worth a young lady's while to acquire the character of a flirt, for the sake of purchasing an hour's vain amusement. And she added, 'that those who were anxious to captivate everybody, generally ended by marrying nobody.' What I have hitherto said, is of course applicable to all occasions; but, in your present position, you must perceive that a single injudicious step may have still more ruinous consequences,—it may even

entirely destroy the fairest prospects of your whole life."

"I would not be thought a vain-glorious heartless flirt for any consideration," said Augusta, with much warmth; "I would rather never go into society again, or speak another word to a living creature, than be looked upon in so contemptible a light. I am very glad that we are to return home to-morrow. I shall be quite ashamed to appear at breakfast, to meet Lord Delmore's eye, or to look at any person who has seen me to-day; and as for Mr. Mortimer, I am sure that I shall never be able to endure the sight of him as long as I breathe."

"Calm yourself, my dear child," pursued Mrs. Mordaunt, kindly; "and, since we cannot recall the past, let us hope for better things for the time to come. I trust that no serious mischief has yet been done; your father intends to repeat the invitation he gave to Lord Delmore when we met him in Yorkshire. I have little doubt that he will still accept it; and when he sees you at Mordaunt in your own natural character, and surrounded by your family party, he will probably forget your behaviour to-night, or at least he will learn to regard it in its true colours. As it is our interest to avoid recalling to his mind disagree-

able recollections, let me entreat you to endeavour to appear to-morrow as if nothing had happened to disquiet you. Contrive to escape entering into conversation with Mr. Mortimer, or sitting near him at breakfast; but, at the same time, beware not to allow any outward difference to be perceptible in your manner towards him."

"How very good and indulgent you are!" replied Augusta, in a subdued tone. "I will attend most carefully to every word you have said, and try to act in all respects exactly as you wish me to do. Though *you* are kind enough to forgive my folly, I feel that I cannot so easily forgive myself; but one thing I will promise you,—you shall never have occasion to reprove me again for being guilty of a similar fault."

Mrs. Mordaunt kissed her daughter affectionately. "Now, my dear Augusta," she observed, "all unpleasant feelings between us are forgotten. You had better go to bed and to sleep as soon as you can." But, after she had wished her good night, she recalled her for an instant.

"I have only one more caution to give you," she continued; "you must take particular care not to let Lady Caroline discover that Mr.

Mortimer's attentions have incurred either my disapprobation or your own. It would be anything but civil to confess that her brother was not agreeable to you, and no other explanation could be made without admitting her into more secrets than I am desirous she should be aware of. Lady Caroline is a charming person, and the fancy she has taken to you is extremely flattering; yet, upon so short an acquaintance, it would be very unwise to communicate to her what ought never to be whispered to any one. All young ladies are curious about love affairs; but, believe me, you will find that none are safely to be trusted with your confidence; and that until everything relating to a matrimonial prospect is definitively settled, the fewer people it is mentioned to the better."

Augusta did not conceal from her mother that Lady Caroline had more than once taxed her with the preference Lord Delmore had shown for her; and that, although she had attempted to evade the charge, her confusion had betrayed that it was well founded.

It gave Mrs. Mordaunt some uneasiness to find that Lady Caroline possessed so much information: she had discernment enough to have partly seen through her ladyship's character; yet she believed that she really liked

Augusta; and as she imagined that she could have no personal interest in opposing the prospect of her union with Lord Delmore, she thought it would be more probable she would prove her friend than her enemy in that affair.

She knew that the young peer and his cousin Philip felt a mutual aversion for each other, and she had no doubt that Mr. Mortimer had talked so much to her daughter for the express purpose of tormenting Lord Delmore. That he had succeeded in his amiable wish was too evident, yet she hoped that all might be easily set right again.

Augusta armed herself the following morning with all sorts of good resolutions, yet she found she was in no danger of being annoyed by Mr. Mortimer's assiduities; he never made his appearance till breakfast was nearly over, and he merely gave her a nod of friendly recognition as he proceeded to the other end of the table.

Lord Delmore had greeted her with a stiffer and more respectful bow; he was standing in the drawing-room when she and Mrs. Mordaunt came down, but he seemed too much engaged in conversation with other people to find time to speak to them; and he took care to place

himself at a considerable distance from them both at breakfast.

Mr. Mordaunt had ordered his carriage early, and when Lady Caroline saw Augusta prepared for her departure, she drew her aside into a window.

"How very disagreeable it is of your father," she exclaimed, "to take you away at this time of day! I had fifty things to say to you that must now remain unsaid. I shall miss you sadly, but I hope you will come here again very soon."

"You are very good to desire this," replied Augusta. "I am sure I feel extremely sorry to leave you, Lady Caroline; I should be very ungrateful if I did not do so. I much wish to thank you for all your kindness."

"Nonsense, my dear; the truth is, you suit me, and I hope that I suit you. I should not like any person to feel totally indifferent towards me. I generally divide my acquaintance into two distinct classes—those who love me, and those who fear me; and I am certainly very desirous to place *you* in the first of these. But to go to another subject:—I must speak a word or two to you about Lionel before we part. I am very angry with him. He behaved last

night like a fool, or something worse: and just now, when Mr. Mordaunt asked him to visit you at Mordaunt, I heard him decline the invitation, upon the pretence of being obliged to go to London in a few days upon business of importance. Now this is really too palpable a fudge, considering that he brought his horses all the way from D'Arcy only yesterday, with the intention of staying here for ages."

The last piece of intelligence completed the measure of Augusta's mortification and distress. The cautionary injunction she had received from her mother rendered her afraid to trust herself to make any answer to Lady Caroline; and she was much relieved by a summons from Mrs. Mordaunt, who informed her that the carriage was waiting, and thus opportunely broke off her *tête-à-tête* with her friend.

Lady Caroline squeezed her hand affectionately, and "looked unutterable things." Augusta hurried on to wish Lady Estonville good morning, and just as she had returned her ladyship's smile and curtesy, Philip Mortimer came forward, and offered her his arm to conduct her to the door. This was very natural and proper, but she almost hated him for his civility. As they passed Lord Delmore, her companion made a pause; his lordship started,

reddened, and half extended his hand: Augusta's pride was wounded; she forgot the provocation she had given him, and recollecting only that he had treated her with neglect, and that she had just been told he had refused to go to Mordaunt, she drew herself up, affected not to perceive his movement, and took leave of him with an appearance of careless indifference. Yet a moment afterwards she bitterly repented the heartless impertinence of her conduct towards him, and could have wept with vexation at her own wayward folly, when it was too late to repair it.

The drive home was a silent and a gloomy one. Mr. Mordaunt seemed to be in a bad humour, Mrs. Mordaunt looked anxious and depressed, and Augusta's appearance was sufficiently miserable. Edward was an outside passenger.

At length Mr. Mordaunt observed, "So, we are not to see Lord Delmore at Mordaunt after all!"

"No," replied Mrs. Mordaunt; "I understand he has been unexpectedly called up to London."

Then, in pity to Augusta, whose distress was painfully evident, she adroitly turned the discourse by remarking "that Lady Estonville

had given her at parting a very pressing invitation to repeat her visit to Estonville Castle before long."

"There will be no harm in doing that," said Mr. Mordaunt; "I passed my time very pleasantly there; there was a good house over our heads, good cheer, and a good party. Her ladyship is very civil in her dawdling way; my lord very hospitable to his guests, and an agreeable man enough when one can get him off the eternal subject of his boring politics; and Lady Caroline is delightful."

Augusta expected in fear and trembling that when she arrived at home, her mother would give her a repetition of the lecture of the preceding night, but she was agreeably surprised to find that she had no such intention.

Mrs. Mordaunt merely told her, the first time they were alone together, "that she could not quite understand Lord Delmore's conduct; that he was reckoned a very odd young man by the world in general, and that she was half inclined to be of the same opinion herself; but, as she had last seen him under peculiar, perhaps trying circumstances, that she should not condemn him until they had met again, which they would probably do in London the following spring, if not sooner."

"My judgment of him," she concluded, "will thus remain in a state of abeyance; and, while this is the case, perhaps the less we any of us think or talk of him the wiser it will be. We have known him a very short time; and should he prove unworthy of our esteem, I trust we shall soon be able to forget him."

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CHAPTER VIII.

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G. Cooper.

[illegible] to follow her mother's [illegible] the recollection of Lord [illegible] possible from her thoughts, [illegible] no easy task; and to [illegible], whatever might be his [illegible], she felt more and more every [illegible] perfectly out of her power. She [illegible] severely for her own be- [illegible] little doubt that this was the [illegible] her mortification was to be [illegible] was aware that the blame of [illegible] rather upon her than [illegible], and she was oppressed by [illegible] that he must deeply de- [illegible].

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in her mind, and, without affecting to observe the uneasiness by which she was tormented, he strove to divert her thoughts, and to amuse her by every means he could devise; but, though his kindness proved extremely beneficial to her, it was not completely successful; and soon after they came back from Estonville he returned to Oxford.

Every object around Miss Mordaunt seemed to have lost its original charm: the first delightful novelty of the country had worn away; her garden no longer afforded her the same pleasure that it had formerly done; her accomplishments were only kept up because her mother would not allow her to neglect them; everything she did appeared to be a bore to her; her spirits became unnaturally variable; and she grew capricious, restless, and dissatisfied with herself.

The return of Dr. Stanley and his daughters to the rectory at Mordaunt, which took place sooner than had been expected, was an event which afforded much pleasure to Miss Mordaunt. She hoped that she should frequently see Laura, whose appearance and manners had made so favourable an impression upon her during their first interview; but she was disappointed by discovering that her mother was

not inclined to promote any great intimacy between them.

Perhaps Mrs. Mordaunt thought it would be imprudent to throw her sons constantly into the society of a very pretty portionless girl, who, according to her ideas, would make an extremely undesirable wife for either of them; and she did not consider that it could prove of any advantage to Augusta to form a violent friendship with the daughter of a country clergyman who possessed neither fashion nor connexions. She entertained a high respect for Miss Stanley, but she did not particularly wish to cultivate her acquaintance as a companion for herself. She was aware that her pursuits and views were widely different from her own, and that she knew nothing of those people who were most interesting to her, and who formed the favourite subjects of her conversation. Dr. Stanley was too learned a man to be suited in every respect to Mr. Mordaunt's taste; yet in early life he had lived much in the world, his ideas were liberal, and his new neighbour began to think that he should find him rather an acquisition,—or in other words, that he would form occasionally a very agreeable addition to his family party.

A few days before Edward went to Oxford,

he and Augusta had walked together to call at the rectory. They found Laura sitting alone. She had evidently been busily occupied before their entrance, yet no work was visible; a large basket stood near her, covered by a silk handkerchief, which appeared as if it had been hastily thrown over it to conceal its contents.

"I wonder what you were doing when we came in?" said Augusta, playfully: "you really looked so guilty that I suspect you must have been engaged in some mischief."

"My sister is very impertinent," continued Edward, whose curiosity had been even more strongly excited than Miss Mordaunt's, but who perceived that Laura seemed both annoyed and confused by her remark. "I will answer for you, Miss Laura, that your employment, whatever it might be, was a praiseworthy one; and if you do not think proper to let us into your secrets, we certainly have no right to extort them from you."

"I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion of me," replied Laura, with a smile; "and for fear I should lower myself in your estimation, I believe I had better not clear up what very little deserves being dignified by the name of a mystery."

"And do you expect that *I* shall be so

easily satisfied?" pursued Augusta. "I will not rest till I have brought you to confession. You never sit idle, I know; let me see how you were likely to be employed? You were trying some new sort of work, which does not probably deserve to remain invisible? That basket confirms the truth of my conjecture."

Laura shook her head.

"You were perhaps beginning a piece of embroidery, which you do not wish me to see until it is finished?"

"You are wrong again," said her companion.

"Then I dare say you were preparing a collection of screens and work-bags for a bazaar?"

"No, indeed I was not."

"Well, I have exhausted all my guesses; and since I can make out nothing in that way, I feel very much tempted to take bolder and more effectual means of prying into your occupations. Will you forgive me?" And, as she spoke, she advanced towards the basket, and gently lifted one corner of the handkerchief that covered it.

What were her surprise and disappointment on discovering that, instead of being filled with curious specimens of fancy-work, it contained a quantity of poor children's clothes of the coarsest description! One little frock, in the

unfinished body of which a needle was still sticking, bore strong evidence of having been the secret work which was hastily thrust out of sight at the approach of the visitors.

An awkward silence followed this *exposé*. Augusta felt much ashamed of what she had done, while Laura blushed deeply at having her charities thus dragged forth into light.

"When I told you," observed Edward, addressing the latter, "that I was convinced you had no cause to be ashamed of your occupation, I said so very sincerely; but I will own that I was then far from doing you full justice. I did not suspect the amiable and exemplary nature of the work you were engaged in. You must allow me to add, that your goodness becomes the more admirable too from your anxiety to conceal it."

Laura's embarrassment increased, yet it did not now appear to be painful to her. At this moment Miss Stanley entered the room, and Edward Mordaunt described to her the little scene which had just taken place.

"Laura's work," she remarked, as she glanced her eye over the contents of the basket, "is certainly of a very homely description, and totally unfit to be displayed before company; yet there is great pleasure in doing it, from the

consideration of the satisfaction it will afford to those for whom it is intended. We generally like to have a good supply of these common things ready for the poor people before the winter."

"How very kind of you!" exclaimed Augusta. "Are such clothes very difficult to make?"

"Oh, no!" replied Laura, "they are done as simply and easily as possible."

"Then it is an art that *I* should be able to learn?"

"To be sure you would, most readily; and if you have any wish to acquire it, it will give me the greatest pleasure to become your instructress."

jected by Dr. Stanley, and had long been conducted very successfully under the superintendence of his daughters. Miss Mordaunt was much struck by the neat, orderly appearance of the children, and by the respect and affection with which they evidently looked up to the Miss Stanleys.

Laura informed her that her father also took great pains to have the Sunday-school properly attended to; and that she and her sister had a class of scholars of their own, who came to them regularly once a week.

"If I knew what to teach them," said Augusta, "I should very much enjoy instructing some of these little girls myself. I wish I was not so ignorant as I am about many things. Will you allow me to be present some day while you are giving a lesson to your pupils?"

"Most willingly," replied Laura, "whenever you can contrive to come; and when you have once seen how little we attempt to teach them, I think you will no longer be afraid of your own insufficiency to undertake the task."

"I am convinced I shall like teaching of all things," exclaimed Augusta; "I am quite impatient to learn how I am to set about the business. I shall ask mamma's leave to arrange

all the preliminaries with you and your sister the moment I get home. Do you think you could both walk to Mordaunt to-morrow morning to talk the matter over with us? If you could, you might also take the same opportunity of beginning another branch of my education, by giving me my first instruction in plain work."

Miss Stanley was much pleased with the eagerness Miss Mordaunt had expressed to become useful to her poor neighbours; she took care to throw no impediments in the way of her designs; and, before the young ladies parted, it was settled that they should meet again the following day.

During their walk back, Edward and his sister naturally talked of what they had just seen, and both were enthusiastic in their praises of the Miss Stanleys.

"I always liked the idea of being a clergyman," said Edward; "but since I have known Dr. Stanley, or more properly speaking, have heard so much of his character, I have grown a thousand times more pleased with the prospect of my future profession."

A new field seemed opened before Augusta, by what she had heard and observed during the last two hours. It had never occurred to

her that it was possible she could be of service to her fellow-creatures, until she accidentally discovered how much good was done by the Miss Stanleys in that way. She had now found an object for exertion, and an occupation that might at once prove interesting to herself and beneficial to others; and she was anxious to follow the admirable and excellent example that had been set her by her new friends.

When the Miss Stanleys arrived at Mordaunt Park the next day, according to their appointment, they were told that Mrs. Mordaunt was not at home, but that she had left word Miss Mordaunt would be extremely happy to see them. They were accordingly admitted; but, though the reception Augusta gave them was particularly cordial, it struck them that there was an air of awkwardness and restraint in her general manner which they had never remarked in it before.

"Mamma desired me to assure you," she said, "how very much it vexed her to be obliged to go out when she knew that you were coming to call here; but she had unfortunately promised to drive over to Somerton before she was aware of our engagement."

"We should have been very sorry," replied Miss Stanley, "if Mrs. Mordaunt had given

up her drive upon our account. I am much afraid that we have prevented you from accompanying her."

"Oh, never mind that. I hate all shopping concerns and formal morning visits. I would much rather enjoy a gossip with *you* at any time, than go upon such an expedition."

"I hope," observed Laura, "that Mrs. Mordaunt approved of our yesterday's scheme. We mentioned it to my father, who was delighted to hear of it. He said he was sure the people in the village would feel very much gratified by your taking that sort of interest in their children."

Augusta blushed very deeply, and bent her eyes upon the ground.

"Alas!" answered she, "I lament to tell you that I must give up all idea of realising those agreeable *chateaux en Espagne* which we built so prettily when last we met. Mamma was much pleased with the description of your school; she thought it seemed a most excellent and useful establishment, and that it was extremely good and kind of you to take so much trouble with the children: but she said that it was impossible to know what complaints poor girls might have; that the small-pox, even after vaccination, had been dreadfully prevalent lately; and that

she had always so great a horror of infection, that she could not feel either comfortable or satisfied in allowing me to expose myself to the danger of catching all sorts of illnesses by being shut up in the same room with my scholars."

Laura looked very much disappointed; but Miss Stanley, whose countenance did not so strongly betray her feelings, mildly observed,

"My sister and I have for some years been in the constant habit of instructing the children at Mordaunt, without ever having felt the slightest ill effect from doing so. If Mrs. Mordaunt had lived in the country as long as we have done, she would not, I dare say, apprehend any unfortunate consequences from your being brought thus into close contact with them. It is natural that those who have spent their time principally in London, should think very differently from us upon this subject. Of one thing, I trust, she is persuaded, that we should never suggest to you any plan which we imagined would not be sanctioned by your mother's approbation; and that now we are aware of her sentiments upon the Sunday-school, we shall not even mention it to you again."

"You are very much mistaken," replied Augusta, "if you believe that mamma does not wish me to take an interest in the school at

Laura half opened a little work-bag which she held in her hand—

"I had brought you," she began, "a whole collection of patterns; but if you should be idly disposed to-day, I will not plague you with them. You shall see them at some other time."

"Thank you," replied Augusta, in a tone of embarrassment; "I certainly do not feel in a very notable humour just at present."

Then, after a pause, during which she seemed to have had a struggle with herself, she continued — "It will be better to tell you the truth at once. I am afraid I must decline becoming your pupil at all. I have still so many things to learn and to practise, that mamma thinks I should not be able to find leisure for work. She says, she intends to give away blankets and clothing to the cottagers at Christmas; and that, if you and your sister will help me with your advice upon the subject, she will entrust the distribution of these things to me."

"We shall be most happy to render you every assistance in our power," pursued Miss Stanley; "and remember, my dear Miss Mordaunt, that it will be very possible for you to be quite as useful to the poor in many other ways as if you had time to make clothes for them yourself."

Edward at that instant rode past the window; and, as he entered the room almost immediately afterwards, the conversation was diverted to other subjects.

"What an extraordinary person Mrs. Mordaunt must be!" remarked Laura to her sister, after they had parted with Augusta and Edward, who had escorted them half-way home when their long morning visit at Mordaunt Park was over. "It is so contradictory that she should object to her daughter's wish of making herself personally useful to the poor people, when she seems so very ready to open her own purse to relieve their wants."

"And yet, my dear Laura," answered Miss Stanley, "if we analyze her character, I believe we shall find that it is by no means an uncommon one. To sum it up in a few words, she is a worldly-minded woman and a fine lady. Her intentions are good, but they are not regulated by principle. She wishes her daughter to be just what she is herself; the greatest anxiety she feels for her is, that she may be approved and admired in a certain privileged circle; and her highest ambition is to see her make a rich and brilliant marriage. Her idea of charity is limited to almsgiving; and she thinks that she fulfils her duty most amply in that respect, if

she bestows yearly a certain portion of her affluence upon those who are in need. It would neither interest nor amuse her to inquire particularly into the circumstances of the persons who profit by her bounty;—she desires it to extend generally to all the poorest objects upon her husband's estate. It is probably from a mistaken affection for her daughter, that she has forbidden her to exert herself in a manner which she thinks might prove disadvantageous to her. She is unwilling to allow her to run the risk of catching any disorder that might impair her boasted beauty, by associating with her inferiors; or of injuring the delicacy of her hands by sewing coarse cotton. And she is afraid that her fine friends might reckon Miss Mordaunt vulgar or ridiculous, if they heard she had permitted her to act as a schoolmistress to a number of dirty, ignorant village children. She will, I have no doubt, be very happy if it affords her daughter satisfaction to distribute comforts to the indigent, with which she possesses the means of supplying her without the slightest danger or inconvenience.

"In Miss Mordaunt there is much to admire in every way; and it is a sad pity that a person who is by nature so amiably disposed should not be instructed to aspire after better things

than mere worldly vanities; that she should never have been taught that there are concerns of far greater importance to attend to than any of those which relate to her temporal interests only; and that her parents should always have led her to believe both by example and precept that it is the sole object of her life to court and please the proud and frivolous leaders of fashion, instead of impressing upon her mind that there is a higher Being, who has the first claim to her adoration, and whose favour it is absolutely essential to her happiness here and hereafter to propitiate."

The intelligence that Charles Mordaunt had obtained leave of absence, and was coming home to spend two months at Mordaunt, was received by his family with the greatest satisfaction. It was now the beginning of November, and he hoped that no severe frost would set in till after Christmas, to interfere with the hunting he promised himself he should enjoy in his father's neighbourhood.

The country was reckoned a very good one. Lord Estonville kept a fine pack of fox-hounds for the purpose of maintaining his political popularity; and his son Philip so far overcame his natural indolence as to undertake the nominal direction of the sport, but the real ma-

agement of the kennel concerns devolved entirely upon the huntsman,—an arrangement which was universally considered extremely judicious.

Captain Mordaunt had heard from his father and mother that they had met Lord Delmore at Mr. Wingfield's; and his friend had expressed himself so strongly about his sister, in a letter he received from him soon after that visit, that he more than half suspected there must have been something very peculiar in his admiration for Augusta. He ardently wished that he might not be mistaken in his conjecture, for he felt convinced that such an alliance would be likely to secure the happiness of two persons to both of whom he was most warmly attached.

When he good-naturedly joked Augusta, the day he arrived at home, upon her supposed conquest of his friend, he perceived at once by her distress and confusion that the subject was no laughing matter to *her*.

He cross-questioned his mother, when he had an opportunity of doing so in private; and he found her extremely anxious to talk to him upon the case, and to ask his opinion of Lord Delmore's character and intentions.

He listened patiently to the long description

Mrs. Mountsorrel gave him of the young peer's conduct, from the moment he was first introduced to his sister, till the morning they last parted at Eastonville Castle. And when it was concluded, he shook his head as he observed,

"It will not do. I know Lionel well; he is not quite heartless as most people suppose him to be, but he shuns society because he thinks that he is only courted for the sake of his rank and fortune. He will never select any girl for his wife unless he can feel thoroughly convinced that she likes and prefers him for himself alone. If he unfortunately believes that Augusta has sought him, or has found amusement in trifling with his feelings, no earthly inducement will persuade him to marry her, though

hope your eloquence will prove successful; but, believe me, all other interference upon your part would be quite wrong. Would you condescend to ask a young man to marry your sister, whose behaviour had plainly indicated that he had not the least wish to do so? And even if he was obliging and kind enough to comply with your request, could you reasonably expect that anything but misery would result from such an extorted union? I feel as indignant as you can be at the baseness of those persons who divert themselves by making up to young ladies without having the slightest intention of marrying them; but such was not Lord Delmore's case. We must recollect that it was Augusta's folly which offended him, and that

though hurried, was as warm as usual; yet the writer regretted in general terms his inability to obey his friend's summons, and added, "that this was the more tantalizing, as he had promised himself very great pleasure in paying a visit to Mordaunt, before a long succession of adverse and vexatious circumstances put it out of his power to realise such an agreeable plan." He concluded by expressing a hope "that it would not be very long before Charles and he would be thrown together, either at D'Arcy, in London, or some other part of the globe."

"This is pretty decisive," said Charles Mordaunt, in an angry, mortified tone, as he folded up the letter he had just received, and handed it to his mother. "Delmore and Augusta are the two greatest idiots I know. They are like babies who have quarrelled about a straw; and continue to vex one another, and destroy their mutual happiness, because they are too proud to own they have been in the wrong, and to make it up again. I have no patience with such folly!"

Mrs. Mordaunt was very much of the same opinion, but she did not express it in such strong terms.

CHAPTER IX.

Bertram. ——————At first
I stuck my choice upon her, ere my heart
Durst make too bold a herald of my tongue.
SHAKSPEARE.

Soon after it was known in the neighbourhood that Captain Mordaunt was arrived at Mordaunt, and moreover that he had shown himself to be decidedly the best horseman in Lord Estonville's hunt, his mother received a little pink note from the Countess, naming an early day on which, she said, "Lord Estonville and herself hoped they might be able to prevail upon Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt, and Miss Mordaunt, to join their family party at Estonville Castle." Her ladyship added, "that she had ventured to enclose an invitation, which she requested her correspondent to have the goodness to give to her son, and also to persuade him to accept; as Lord Estonville was very anxious to make his acquaintance."

"Her ladyship is very gracious," observed

Mr. Mordaunt, with a sneer. "If the style of this long note was not so peculiarly her own, I should be tempted to imagine she had deputed the task of writing it to her charming daughter. — Charles, you will fall in love with Lady Caroline Mortimer."

"No, I do not think that I shall," replied Captain Mordaunt. "Though I am not personally acquainted with her, I know her already by sight as well as by description."

"You may do both," continued his father; "but until you have seen her at home, and listened to her conversation, you can have no idea how fascinating and dangerous a person she is;—I say, dangerous, because she is reported not to be very apt to return the admiration she inspires."

"If that is the case," said Charles with a smile, "I must endeavour to steel my heart against her charms: yet, cruel as she is generally supposed to be, I cannot help entertaining a shrewd suspicion that Nature has not made her so completely insensible to all tender feelings, that there does not exist some one upon the face of the earth, who might be able to induce her to give a favourable hearing to a tale of love."

There seemed to be a peculiar meaning at-

tached to these last words, and as her son pronounced them, Mrs. Mordaunt regarded him with a look of curious inquiry. But he did not appear to observe it; at any rate, he was evidently determined not to enter into any farther explanation.

Augusta would have been very much pleased at the thoughts of seeing her friend Lady Caroline, if she had not felt afraid of what she might say to her about Lord Delmore. She knew that Philip Mortimer was not at home, therefore she was relieved from all dread of persecution from him. As she drew near to Estonville, however, the recollection of her former visit oppressed her very painfully; and when the towers of the castle actually caught her eye, a most uncomfortable sensation came over her, and she felt as if she had scarcely power to draw her breath.

Lady Caroline's manner towards her when they met was all kindness; she appeared delighted to have her with her again, and received her almost with the affection of a relation. She found a thousand flattering and agreeable things to tell her, and as she had visibly no intention of making any allusion to her cousin, Augusta's spirits threw off by degrees the weight which

had pressed so heavily upon them, and she began to find herself quite happy and at her ease.

"Is that your brother?" inquired Lady Caroline, as Charles Mordaunt entered the room together with two or three other gentlemen who were just returned from hunting. "What a distinguished-looking young man he is! I wonder you never told me he was very handsome. Perhaps you fancied I should consider *that* as a thing of course in any person of the Mordaunt family."

Augusta blushed as she replied, "I am very glad you think him so. May I, in my turn, ask you the names of those gentlemen opposite to us, who are strangers to me?"

"To be sure you may. I shall be most happy to give you every possible information in my power respecting them. I feel quite ashamed of not having volunteered to instruct you in their different styles and titles. That gawky, sheepish-looking personage, who seems principally to have attracted your attention, is Mr. Horseley, a near neighbour of ours, and a fox-hunting 'squire of low degree,' whose ideas do not extend very far beyond the narrow limits of his own paternal acres, and whose greatest ambition in life is to possess a good steed, and

to secure a good dinner. When you have seen more of the country, you will discover that there are many such characters to be found in it."

"He must at least be a happy man," observed Augusta, "since his two principal wishes may, I suppose, be easily gratified."

"Oh, certainly: and to add to Mr. Horseley's good fortune, I perceive that you are determined to be pleased with him.—That heavy middle-aged worthy, with coarse features and a dark complexion, who has placed himself so comfortably before the fire, is Mr. Platt. I see you think him vulgar; but you must not despise him, for he is the possessor of millions of money, which his father amassed in trade,—or perhaps it would sound better to say, by his ability in commercial affairs. Mr. Platt has obstinately remained an old bachelor, in defiance of the condescending advances of several heads of families who are rather less refined in their views for the establishment of their daughters than Mrs. Mordaunt. He always appears to me a personification of *l'homme content*: for his wealth gives him a sort of consequence, and enables him to command the enjoyment of all the good things of this world."

"Is it not Lord Byron who tells us that 'Wealth is power'?" replied Augusta.

"Yes, and so it is," pursued Lady Caroline; "but when it is not smoothed down and polished by the hand of elegance, it is power in a very coarse, repulsive shape. It forces itself on by mere weight of metal, and, like a steam-engine, carries everything irresistibly before it."

"Your similes are always as just as they are entertaining," observed Miss Mordaunt. "I suppose this modern Crœsus is tolerably purse-proud?"

"You are not mistaken; yet we must forgive him that little failing, since his immense fortune is the only recommendation he can boast. In spite of all that I have said, however, I fully appreciate the wonderful utility of the steam-engine, and nobody is inclined to undervalue money less than I am. In short, one cannot do without it. To wind up Mr. Platt's history—he came into this part of the country to look at an estate; but he does not like it well enough to buy it; so we shall not have the happiness of retaining him in our neighbourhood.

"The name of the short, thick-set little Nimrod who is now talking to Mr. Horseley, is

Singleton: he is an electioneering friend of my father's, and the greatest gossip in England. I believe he cares very little about hunting; but he goes out constantly for the purpose of collecting all the news of the neighbourhood. Between ourselves, I suspect that this is the case with very many more sportsmen, if we could make them confess the truth."

"I conclude," pursued Augusta, "that he often entertains you with his anecdotes and histories."

"I cannot say that he ever amuses me," answered Lady Caroline, "for he is the greatest bore upon earth; but I am sometimes obliged to listen to his narrations with as civil a face as may be."

"Poor Mr. Singleton! After what I have heard of him, I think I need not be very anxious to add him to the list of my acquaintance. Who is that young man who is standing by Lady Estonville?—he seems to be a friend of my brother's."

"Do you mean the exquisite youth whose scarlet coat looks as if it had come new this morning from Mr. Stultz's hands, and whose elegant boots appear as if they never were intended to be splashed with mud? Is it possible you do not know him?"

"I do not indeed."

"You should really be careful, my dear," continued her ladyship, with mock gravity, "not to make this sort of admission again; for, alas! such ignorance almost argues yourself unknown. That young man is Mr. Stafford. You must have heard of him. He is an Irishman by birth, but he has lived a great deal abroad, and as he has taste enough to like good society, he has contrived to establish himself in an excellent place in the world. His fortune is immense, and he is consequently a sort of person all young ladies like to talk to and to dance with, and all old ladies consider it desirable to flatter and to treat with distinguished attention. I laugh at him for his fancies about his dress, and some other little harmless vanities; but, in truth, he is far superior to the people one generally meets with in society. You will find him by no means a common-place, every-day character; and I predict that you will think him agreeable. *I* consider him extremely so. He was a constant flirt of mine, until I discovered that his peace of mind was in danger of being affected by our long conversations. We came to an explanation, and we now understand one another perfectly, and are the best friends imaginable. It is very

possible, you know, to find great pleasure in talking to a person one sees occasionally, and still to imagine he might not prove an entertaining companion for life; and to feel a very sincere regard for a man one might not wish to marry. Mr. Stafford only arrived here yesterday, and I fear we shall not be able to detain him very long; he is so popular, that he is always perplexed with twice as many invitations as he is able to accept."

As Lady Caroline concluded this description, the subject of it came up to speak to her; she inquired how he had been amused out hunting.

"Oh, very much indeed," replied he; "I admired the hounds extremely, and we have had excellent sport. Now, why do you smile, Lady Caroline? You are as malicious as your brother would be. Philip always declares that I know nothing about fox-hunting, and that I have no vocation for field-sports. But if you will not give credit to *my* report of the proceedings to-day, I must call upon Captain Mordaunt to confirm it; nobody will be inclined to dispute *his* authority in these matters, I presume."

"His sister will not, I dare say," observed her ladyship. "Miss Mordaunt, allow me to present Mr. Stafford to you. And now, Mr.

Stafford," continued she, half pitying the confusion she had thrown him into, "you must bring your voucher, and introduce him to me, for I have not yet the pleasure of knowing Captain Mordaunt."

Though Charles Mordaunt had been prejudiced against Lady Caroline Mortimer, he could not help thinking her uncommonly agreeable; and he was more flattered than he chose to confess to himself, by perceiving that she was anxious to render herself peculiarly so to him. He began to suspect that he might have taken an erroneous view of her character, and have been led to judge it too severely.

She told him she could not look upon him as a stranger, because she had heard so much of him from Lord Delmore; and she added, "that the relation Lionel had given her of his kindness to *him*, had taught her to regard his name with admiration and respect, and to rejoice that her cousin, who often stood in need of counsel and guidance, had the good fortune of possessing so excellent a friend."

"Delmore has been staying here lately, has he not?" observed Captain Mordaunt.

"He was with us early in the autumn," replied Lady Caroline; "but his visit was a very shabby one; he was in a great hurry to

go on to London. Can you tell me where he is, and what he is doing at present?"

This answer entirely destroyed Charles's hope of discovering anything farther about Lord Delmore's plans and proceedings from his cousin.

"What a lovely creature your sister is!" was Lady Caroline's next remark. "She is so amiable and unaffected too, that it is quite impossible everybody should not be enchanted with her. She will make an extraordinary sensation when she appears in town."

Captain Mordaunt expressed pretty strongly how much gratified he felt by this compliment to his sister; but if Lady Caroline had flattered herself that she should be able to lead him on to talk to her of the impression Augusta was reported to have made upon Lord Delmore's heart, she was disappointed.

Meanwhile it was evident that Mr. Stafford had been much struck by Miss Mordaunt's beauty, and before she had been three days at Estonville Castle, it was the decided opinion of every one of the party there, that it would be her own fault if she did not permanently eclipse all her former rivals in his affections.

"What do you think of Mr. Stafford?" said Mrs. Mordaunt to her husband, when she

found an opportunity of talking the matter over with him.

"That he is the image of a man who has long been dead," replied Mr. Mordaunt, "and for whom I felt so great an aversion when he was alive, that it is still quite disagreeable to me to look upon his resemblance."

"You mean Mr. O'Donnel—the person who married your poor cousin Miss Mordaunt."

"The same. Then you too have perceived the likeness? But how would it have been possible you should not have done so?"

"It is very remarkable, certainly," pursued Mrs. Mordaunt. "As Mr. Stafford is an Irishman, it is not however improbable that he may be related to Mr. O'Donnel's family."

"No; I have his own authority for assuring you that he is not. The same idea had occurred to myself, and I contrived to ask him the question in a roundabout way; but he told me very distinctly that he could not claim the least kindred with anybody of the name of O'Donnel."

"Well, after all, the best part of Mr. O'Donnel was his appearance; and as this young man does not seem to resemble him in anything else, I think we may easily forgive him the accidental circumstance of being like him in that

particular. You must, I am sure, have observed how much he admires Augusta; and from all I have seen and heard of him, it strikes me that he would prove a most desirable *parti* for our daughter."

"There is no doubt that he is enormously rich; and though some of his finical ways do not exactly suit my taste, he has the ideas and the manners of a gentleman. But have you entirely given up or forgotten your former project of marrying Augusta to Lord Delmore? I should like him much better as my son-in-law than Mr. Stafford."

"So should I," continued Mrs. Mordaunt, "if I imagined there was still the slightest chance of his ever becoming so. Augusta unfortunately offended him when we were last staying at this place, and since that time he has repeatedly refused to visit us at Mordaunt, and has taken no sort of notice of us: therefore we may too surely conclude that he wishes to decline all farther intimacy with us.—As one bright prospect has thus vanished from before us, it appears to me that our wisest method of repairing the evil, will be to take advantage of the happy opportunity which seems now about to present itself to us of securing a most eligible

dishment for our daughter. Barring rank,

Mr. Stafford has every possession the world can desire, to offer to her acceptance."

"Well then, since he finds so much favour in your sight, let him throw himself and his thousands at Augusta's feet whenever he thinks proper; and if she is pleased to smile upon his suit, I promise you that I will not oppose it."

That Augusta might probably not feel inclined to receive a declaration of attachment from Mr. Stafford with quite so much satisfaction as she wished her to do, was an apprehension that preyed heavily upon Mrs. Mordaunt's mind. She perceived that her daughter considered him an agreeable man—that she was amused with his conversation, and flattered by his attentions; but she knew too well how to read what was passing in her thoughts, not to be aware that she was far from suspecting the serious nature of his admiration for her. She saw that Augusta looked upon his earnest professions of devotion as mere empty compliments, and that she listened to them with indifference; while her varying colour, if Lord Delmore's name was accidentally mentioned in her hearing, betrayed that the warm interest she felt in everything relating to him was still undiminished.

Lady Caroline took care to throw Augusta

and Mr. Stafford as much together as possible; yet, as she constantly joined in their conversation, she contrived that the one should remain unconscious that it was the desire of the other to address his discourse exclusively to her.

Her ladyship had a little under-plot of her own upon Captain Mordaunt, to carry on at the same time. With the true spirit of a coquette, she was particularly anxious to captivate him, because she discovered that his heart was proof against her attractions. She did not doubt that he thought her a most delightful person; she believed that she had succeeded in making an impression upon his vanity; but she could not rest satisfied, since he had not fallen in love with her.

One morning, when Lady Caroline and Augusta were returning home through the village of Estonville, after a long walk, the latter described to her companion how kind the Miss Stanleys were to the poor people, and mentioned the wish she had herself felt to imitate them in this respect.

"I have always heard," replied her ladyship, "that the whole family are excellent people; yet I must say, I am not surprised that Mrs. Mordaunt refused to allow you to become a charity-school mistress. Such an occupation

is very praiseworthy and very proper for clergymen's daughters; but it would not be at all suitable for you or for me. There is nobody who possesses a nicer tact than your mother, or whose judgment and discretion in all questions of this kind may be more safely depended upon. Believe me, when you are a few years older, you will see very plainly why it is that she has now done wisely in preventing your forming a very close friendship with such young ladies as these Miss Stanleys."

Augusta coloured. "It was not," she said, "because mamma disliked my being intimate with the Miss Stanleys, that she objected to my adopting the plans they had suggested. She always speaks of our neighbours in the highest terms. They are, I assure you, both of them delightful in their different ways, particularly the youngest, who is also uncommonly pretty; just the style of beauty you would admire, Lady Caroline. I am certain, if you knew them, that you would like them."

Lady Caroline smiled incredulously and haughtily. "My dear Augusta," she observed, "they would not be at all in *my* way, though I am very willing to allow them every possible merit. I am not acquainted with them, to be sure, but I know exactly what sort of

persons they are; and you must not be offended with what I am going to say to you about them. I have no doubt you will find them extremely agreeable companions to see now and then, as worthy and respectable country neighbours; but if you will take my advice, you will avoid cultivating them more warmly than cordial civility requires, and you will by no means make bosom-friends of them. These sort of sentimental *liaisons* between girls who are likely to be thrown into very different society, generally end abruptly and disagreeably, and give a *mauvais air* to one of the parties, while they reflect ridicule upon the other." She paused, and then, as if irresolutely, continued: "I have yet a stronger reason for cautioning you about the Miss Stanleys. I have good grounds to imagine that they are slightly infected with Methodistical principles: if this is true, it is a sort of disorder that increases rapidly where it has once taken root, and is likewise very easily communicated. Now, I happen to know that a certain cousin of mine holds all Methodists in absolute abhorrence, and has the greatest dread of their gaining an influence over the mind of any person in whom he feels a peculiar interest. He made himself perfectly miserable soon after his brother's death, when he fancied (errone-

ously enough) that his mother and Agnes were in danger of falling into the hands of evangelical friends, and of becoming 'righteous over much.'"

This was the only time Lady Caroline had made the slightest allusion to Lord Delmore in speaking to Miss Mordaunt. Augusta's face became crimson; she said not a word in reply, but the hint that had been given to her sunk deeply into her mind, and left there the full impression her artful companion had intended it to produce.

When she afterwards recalled every syllable of the foregoing conversation, she could not help acknowledging to herself, that her mother had certainly indirectly endeavoured to discourage her seeing a great deal of the Miss Stanleys. This had never struck her before. She now imagined that Mrs. Mordaunt might perhaps suspect that they were too strict in their religious ideas; at any rate, it was evident that she must regard them in the same point of view Lady Caroline did. And Augusta sighed heavily at having discovered that adverse circumstances rendered it necessary for her to renounce the friendship of so amiable and engaging a companion as she had always found in Laura.

It may seem extraordinary that Lady Caroline should have taken the trouble of prejudicing her against her neighbours, or that she should have found any motive to induce her to do so. The truth was, her ladyship had determined to obtain a complete ascendency over Augusta. To accomplish this purpose, she had flattered her vanity, affected the greatest anxiety to forward all her wishes, and sought—by every means she could devise—to render herself agreeable to her; and she had succeeded but too well. The natural rectitude of her pupil's mind was beginning to be in some degree warped by her insidious arguments; she had taught her insensibly to adopt *her* opinions, to judge of people and things by *her* standard, to think highly of herself, and to despise all those who were not fortunate enough to have obtained the distinguished sanction of *her* approbation.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt were dazzled and gratified by seeing their daughter thus warmly patronised by a person of Lady Caroline's high rank and fashion—one, too, who was generally reckoned so very exclusive, and difficult to please. They did not suppose it possible that any bad consequences could result to Augusta from such an intimacy; and, as they were very

ready to do all in their power to promote it, her ladyship perceived that she need not apprehend the slightest opposition to her plans from their interference.

Should Miss Mordaunt, however, be permitted to form a close friendship with the Miss Stanleys, who, by character, were well known to Lady Caroline; she saw too much cause to fear that the right and good principles they would be likely to instil, and the excellent and amiable example they would always set before her, would probably counteract the mischievous influence she had laboured so hard to establish; and that her destined victim would, after all, escape from her snares. To avert such a mortification, she determined to persuade Augusta to break off any very frequent intercourse with Doctor Stanley's family for the future.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt were prevailed upon to stay at Estonville Castle for more than a fortnight. Mr. Stafford remained there also, though everybody was aware that at the end of the first week he had a previous engagement of long standing, to join a large party at the house of another of his titled friends.

His admiration for Augusta became daily more evident and decided; and on the morning of her father's departure, he told him, "that if

he thought it would be perfectly convenient to him and Mrs. Mordaunt to receive him, he should feel very much tempted to take the liberty of proposing to spend a few days with them at Mordaunt in his way back to town."

Augusta overheard this proposal made, and, of course, very graciously accepted. It partly opened her eyes to a very unwelcome truth, and formed at the same time a most painful contrast to Lord Delmore's behaviour upon a similar occasion. She reddened violently, and then brushed away a tear, as she turned to talk hurriedly and incomprehensibly to Mr. Singleton upon some uninteresting subject.

"Well, Lady Caroline," observed that gentleman, as Mr. Mordaunt's carriage drove away from the door, and he slowly retraced his steps after having watched Mr. Stafford hand Augusta into it, "I think we may pretty surely foretell that there will be a match there. Did you ever see anything more decided?"

"All seems, certainly," replied her ladyship, "to go on most happily. She is a charming creature! Mr. Stafford will be a particularly fortunate man."

"I suspect," continued Mr. Singleton, "that he was formerly a little too ambitious in his views. I beg your ladyship's pardon," (for at

this allusion she drew herself up very proudly,) "I did not mean to offend you. But he is grown wiser now, and Miss Mordaunt will make him a very suitable and admirable wife. She will keep him upon the right side of politics, too. I am very happy to find that Mr. Mordaunt is one of us."

"The whole family are in every way a great acquisition to this neighbourhood," said Lady Caroline; and she went on talking of them to Mr. Singleton for a length of time.

It gave her much satisfaction to see that he considered the marriage of Augusta and Mr. Stafford to be a settled thing. She had no doubt that he would immediately disseminate the report of it as such, far and wide; and she was extremely desirous that this intelligence should reach Lord Delmore's ear as speedily as possible, and with the appearance of coming from the most unquestionable authority.

She therefore contrived (when he appealed to her for her opinion upon the subject) to strengthen his conviction, by making every admission he could require; but she took good care not to commit herself so far as to enable him to quote *her* as his informant, or to say that she had told him one decided word about her friend Miss Mordaunt's affairs.

When Mr. Singleton took leave of her ladyship, he internally vaunted himself not a little upon the diplomatic ability he had displayed in having extracted from her all that he wanted to ascertain; and as he turned his horse's head homewards, he felt a conscious pride in believing that he had actually outwitted so very clever a person as Lady Caroline Mortimer.

Captain Mordaunt had had much to gratify him, but he had likewise seen a great deal that displeased him, during his visit at Estonville. He had been to a certain degree fascinated by Lady Caroline's wit and beauty, yet he could never entirely surmount the feeling of mistrust with which he had originally regarded her; and upon a farther acquaintance with her, he found this rather increased than diminished.

He looked upon her as by no means an eligible companion for his sister; but his father and mother would not listen to any of his suggestions upon this point: and when he ventured to hint something of the kind to Augusta herself, she was violently offended with him; told him "she was no longer a child, and would not, consequently, bear to be dictated to by him; and that he need not take the trouble of abusing her charming friend Lady Caroline, since she

would not hear a single word in her dispraise."

Charles was mortified by his sister's ungracious behaviour towards him. The fear he had entertained that her happiness might be affected by Lord Delmore's desertion, was completely removed by the apparent satisfaction with which she received Mr. Stafford's attentions. He was far from being selfish enough not to rejoice at the prospect of her making a very advantageous marriage; yet he could not help internally wondering how it was possible that she could be pleased with an admirer like Mr. Stafford, so soon after she had returned the decided preference of such a young man as Lord Delmore, and it is almost to be apprehended that he felt half-inclined to despise her taste.

CHAPTER X.

In gay fatigues, this most undaunted chief,
Patient of idleness beyond belief,
Most charitably lends the town his face,
For ornament to ev'ry public place.
As sure as cards he to the assembly comes,
And is the furniture of drawing-rooms;
When Ombre calls, his hand and heart are free,
And join'd to two, he fails not—to make three.
Narcissus is the glory of his race,
For who does nothing with a better grace?

YOUNG.

MR. STAFFORD's father was an Irishman, who had passed the early part of his life in India, where he had made a large fortune in a comparatively short time. He returned to England, and then it was that he discovered he had unluckily acquired the art of spending his money even faster than he had gained it. After enjoying a few years of splendour and luxury, and being considered one of the richest nabobs in Harley-street, he had the mortification of finding that he was completely ruined,

and that it would be no longer possible for him to keep up appearances to the world, or to maintain such an establishment as habit had rendered necessary to his comfort.

The idea of retracing his steps to the East, and setting about the laborious task of endeavouring to amass a second fortune, was by no means agreeable to him; yet he felt that he could not exist in poverty, and no other method of recruiting his exhausted finances presented itself to his imagination. He therefore prepared again to leave his native land; and he hoped that when he arrived in India, his knowledge of the country, and the situations he had formerly held there, would enable him to prosecute his undertaking with great advantage.

He was not deceived in this expectation: everything went on prosperously with him; and he had not been a very great while re-established abroad, when he had the good luck to insinuate himself into the favour of a young lady, whose portion bestowed upon him present affluence, and whose future prospects promised him immense wealth.

She was the daughter of a man who had amassed almost countless riches during a very protracted residence in India, and who, though now far advanced in age and broken in con-

stitution, could not bear the thoughts of giving up his lucrative employments for the sake of ending his days in ease and tranquillity in a country from which he had been so long estranged, that he was aware he should, if he returned to it, find few of his relations, and still fewer of his former friends, still alive to remember him.

His daughter had been sent to England for her education; and the stepmother, who had replaced her own parent during her absence, rendered her father's house so disagreeable to her when she came back to India, that she was extremely happy to accept Mr. Stafford's hand.

It was the joint interest of both the ladies to persuade the old gentleman that a warm climate did not agree with Miss Oram's health; and it was consequently made one of the conditions of her marriage, that her future husband should take her immediately to Europe.

Her father gave her a large fortune upon her wedding-day; and, to the dismay and disappointment of her mother-in-law, he declared that he had settled one half of his wealth upon her at his death, while the other half was secured to her step-sister. In case either of these

young ladies should die without children, the whole of the inheritance was to devolve to the survivor.

About three years after Mrs. Stafford left India, the loss of her father put her into the possession of the moiety of his riches; and the following spring she gave birth to a son,—an event which afforded great satisfaction to her husband, as it secured his retaining her fortune in his family. Her sister had married about the same time as herself, and she had already heard of her having two children.

Mrs. Stafford was not fated to enjoy her prosperity very long. Her health had always been extremely delicate, and after her confinement it became still more so: she lingered on for some months, and her existence was at length terminated by a rapid decline.

Her husband had never been much attached to her during her life, yet he was a good deal shocked at her death, and considerably vexed to think that, instead of having the money she had left at his own entire disposal, he would in future only have the management of it as the guardian of his son.

This precious child (the hero to whom we have already been introduced at Estonville

Castle) became now the sole object of his affection and solicitude, and he watched over his health with an almost prejudicial anxiety.

During the period of his first deep mourning, he took him over to Ireland, to an estate he had purchased near the place of his own birth, and upon which he had just built an excellent house. There Mr. Stafford remained in solitude until he thought it no longer indecorous to assemble a party of friends around him; and there he returned for two successive summers.

Late in the autumn that followed the last of these, he took a sudden resolution of going to spend the winter in Italy. His son, in spite of all his care and watching, grew more and more sickly; and he determined to try if a warmer climate might not prove beneficial to him. The experiment succeeded most happily, —the boy's constitution seemed immediately strengthened by the genial air of the South; and, as it suited him so well, his father kept him abroad till he was old enough to be sent to a public school. Mr. Stafford then established himself in London; but his friends remarked that he had become an altered man since the death of his wife: "they had not supposed," they said, "that he would have taken her loss so much to heart." He appeared to have lost

all pleasure in society, and yet to be unable to exist without it. He often looked melancholy and abstracted; and even to his son, the idol of all his hopes and affections, his manner was frequently harsh and ungracious.

Just before young Stafford came of age, his father made a journey to Ireland upon business: he had not been there since his residence upon the Continent, and he intended that his present visit to his estate should be a very short one. He caught a violent cold, however, by sleeping in a house which had been so many years uninhabited: he neglected at first to call in medical advice, and when at length he found himself obliged to do so, it came too late to be of any avail.

The moment he was aware of his danger, he expressed the greatest anxiety to see his son; an immediate summons was despatched to young Mr. Stafford, but although he travelled with the most desperate expedition, his father had expired before he arrived in Ireland.

Thus, ere he had attained his majority, Mr. Stafford was left entirely his own master. He had been brought up in luxury, and he soon plunged into every sort of extravagance. His early recollections led him to find interest and amusement in revisiting as a man those foreign

countries where he had spent so many years as a child, and he frequently lingered away month after month upon the Continent. Most of his friends and intimate companions at Westminster had been boys of rank, or of greater connexions than himself; and his acquaintance with these, together with the reputation of his immense wealth, gained him admission as one of a set of fine young men, by whom he was cajoled when he was present, laughed at when his back was turned, and considered as a fair prey at all times.

He was generally reckoned very handsome, and his features were certainly remarkably so; but their expression was always unpleasant, and upon any angry excitement singularly bad. His personal vanity was excessive; and, indeed, vanity of every description was one of the leading points of his character. His tastes were frivolous but *recherché*, and his manners were rather effeminate; yet this circumstance arose perhaps more from the original delicacy of his constitution than from his natural disposition.

As the idea of residing in so barbarous a country as Ireland was by no means congenial to the fancy of a person of his refinement, he sold all his property there, and purchased an estate at an easy distance from London, upon

which there was a magnificent house. At this place he kept a princely establishment; he also retained his father's handsome abode in town, and he rented a shooting-box in the Highlands; but as he was no great sportsman himself, the last appendage was intended less for his own amusement than for that of the friends who were kind enough to go down and visit him when he was in the North.

Like many other people, Mr. Stafford at length grew tired of the wandering, unsettled sort of life he had been leading; and he began to entertain serious thoughts of marrying. While he was considering whom he could select as a wife, he happened to become acquainted with Lady Caroline Mortimer. She was exactly the kind of person at once to suit his taste and to gratify his ambitious views. He was captivated by her beauty—dazzled by her rank; he saw how much she was admired and sought after in the world; he fancied how handsome and dignified she would look at the head of his table, sparkling with the jewels he should present to her; he imagined that some portion of her distinction would be reflected upon her husband; and he became one of the most devoted aspirants for her favour.

It amused Lady Caroline to give him at first

so much encouragement, that he soon felt perfectly convinced she would be very willing to accept his hand whenever he made up his mind to proffer it. The trial came. In an unguarded moment he poured forth a declaration of his attachment; but, contrary to his expectation, her ladyship received it with affected surprise.

With many expressions of concern, she gave so decided a negative to his hopes, that he felt they were annihilated for ever. His countenance betrayed the violence of his disappointment and anger; and as she dreaded some outbreak of resentment, she condescended to endeavour to soothe the bitterness of his mortification.

Her eloquence was as artful as it was persuasive. She assured him, "the regard she entertained for him was so sincere, that she trusted they might always continue good friends; that it would be ridiculous to quarrel, or to avoid one another, in consequence of what had just transpired; and that the wisest, as well as (to her) the most agreeable plan they could pursue, would be to forget the conversation of the present hour, and to consider themselves as replaced in future upon the same cordial and amicable footing as formerly."

Mr. Stafford was at least calmed and appeased,

if not satisfied, by this reasoning. He still felt that he had been extremely ill used, and his vanity could ill brook the mortification it had received. A little after-reflection convinced him, however, of the folly of exposing to others how deeply his feelings had been wounded; and he perceived that, if he profited by Lady Caroline's hint and continued to be seen among her train of admirers, nobody need discover that he had actually proposed to her,—or, what was much worse, that she had rejected him.

It cost him a great effort to conquer his pride and to subdue his rebellious spirit,—but he succeeded in gaining the mastery over both; and no one need have suspected from his behaviour that any peculiar explanation had taken place between him and Lady Caroline Mortimer. He dined at her father's as often as usual; he was as constant an attendant as ever in her mother's Opera-box, and he was seen by her side upon all public occasions quite as frequently as he had formerly been.

In the course of the following winter he took care to make it known to his friends, that he was going to spend a week at Estonville Castle; that it was rather inconvenient to him to do so just at that time, but that Lord and Lady Estonville had pressed him so often to visit

them in the country, that he found it impossible to decline a point-blank invitation he had received from them.

The evening after Mr. Stafford's arrival at Estonville, Lady Caroline talked with great enthusiasm of her charming friend Miss Mordaunt. She did not mention her in her conversation with him, or say that she was expected to join their party the next day; but he heard her speak of her to others, and he felt a curiosity to see her. He knew Captain Mordaunt, without being the least acquainted with any of his family; and it did not at the moment occur to him that the young lady in question was likely to be a sister of his.

When he was actually introduced to Augusta, he found her much more beautiful than he had expected;—he was prepared to think her delightful;—and he soon believed himself desperately in love with her.

Her birth was not quite so illustrious as he could have wished, but she was handsome enough to be an ornament to any station; she possessed fashion, accomplishments, and the advantage of being very highly approved by such an excellent judge of all that was *comme il faut* as Lady Caroline Mortimer;—in short, he considered

her in every respect worthy of the distinguished honour of becoming Mrs. Stafford.

That Augusta would be too happy to give a favourable reception to the flattering proposition he had determined to make to her, he did not entertain a doubt; and he was impatient to open his mind to her as speedily as possible, that he might be able to settle all the preliminaries of his projected union with her parents and herself before he returned to London.

With this purpose, he fixed an early period for his proffered visit to Mordaunt; and when he arrived there, his manner was marked by the *empressement* of a person who is desirous to render himself agreeable to every member of the family he is come to see, for the sake of appearing peculiarly pleasing in the eyes of some one of them in particular.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt received him with marked kindness; Charles welcomed him with frank civility,—but he fancied that Augusta looked rather shy upon him.

Mrs. and Miss Carewell, and two or three other guests, were staying in the house; and in the evening, when Mr. Stafford was desirous to devote himself exclusively to Miss Mordaunt,

he was much provoked by Miss Carewell's drawing her chair close to them, with the evident determination of fixing herself upon him, to begin an interminable sentimental conversation about their charming mutual friend, dear Lady Caroline Mortimer.

She told him, 'that although she had not had the pleasure of being previously acquainted with him, she should make no apology for venturing to address him upon a subject so interesting to them both.' She descanted at great length upon Lady Caroline's perfections—upon her own devoted attachment for her; insinuated pretty plainly that she was well aware of the tender nature of *his* sentiments towards her fascinating friend; and assured him that nobody could enter more truly into his feelings, or know how to compassionate him more sincerely, than herself.

Mr. Stafford was more vexed and annoyed by this ill-timed and impertinent attack than he dared to express; and he endeavoured to silence his tormentor, by admitting that he thought Lady Caroline Mortimer a most delightful person, as he believed everybody else did; but he positively disclaimed ever having entertained any warmer feelings towards her ladyship than those of esteem.

"Oh," said Miss Carewell, with an incredulous shake of her head, "all gentlemen deny these sort of things; but we know better than to be deceived by their assertions of indifference, do we not, dear Miss Mordaunt? I happen to be admitted more deeply into Lady Caroline's secrets than you perhaps imagine."

The appeal to Augusta provoked her admirer almost beyond endurance; and what exasperated him still more keenly than anything Miss Carewell could say, was observing that her companion was evidently much amused by the turn the conversation had taken, and that she appeared extremely obliged to her guest for having intruded her company upon them and broken off their *tête-à-tête*.

Mr. Stafford's countenance darkened; the cloud which had been gathering upon his brow contracted it to a most ominous scowl; he bit his lip with ill-suppressed rage, and muttering something between his teeth about the insufferable impertinence of romantic, ignorant, would-be fine ladies, he turned his back completely upon Miss Carewell, and asked Augusta if she would not have the kindness to play one of her brilliant lessons upon the pianoforte?

"I do not understand this," thought the forsaken damsel to herself. "If Mr. Stafford's

manners are always as ungracious and as bearish as they have been to me to-night, I must confess that he is a most unprepossessing person; and I cannot wonder that Lady Caroline should often treat him as cavalierly as she is reported to do, still less that she should have declined having anything to say to him as a husband. I suspect that Miss Mordaunt is not much more fascinated with him than her friend; she does not appear as if she considered him particularly agreeable. But here comes Captain Mordaunt,—*he* is a young man of a very different stamp."

And, as the captain advanced towards her, Miss Carewell put on what she believed to be one of her most bewitching smiles; for she had taken it into her head that it would be a very feasible and delightful plan to make a conquest of the handsome heir of Mordaunt.

Charles had at once seen through her designs; they diverted him extremely, and he thought it would be very fair to amuse himself by affecting to feel the admiration with which she intended to inspire him. He had received a hint, too, from his mother, "that it would be very expedient for him to occupy the silly creature's attention, since she was far too vain and stupid to perceive or understand what was

going forward between his sister and Mr. Stafford; that she was consequently always putting herself in their way, and that she positively would not allow the latter to speak to Augusta."

It is unnecessary to detail the particulars of the flirtation which took place between Charles and Miss Carewell during the rest of the evening; it is enough to say that the captain played his part so admirably, that his attentions very soon obliterated all recollection of the slight she had received from Mr. Stafford, from the young lady's sensitive mind. She lay awake for two whole hours that night, composing the sketch of the letter she had no doubt it would speedily be her pleasing task to write to Lady Caroline Mortimer, to announce to her the happy and interesting intelligence of her approaching union with Captain Mordaunt; and when she at last fell asleep, she dreamed of nothing but choosing of jewels and ornaments, and selecting a magnificent wedding *trousseau*.

The more Mr. Stafford saw of Augusta, the less did he feel himself at ease with her. Her manner towards him had become at all times reserved, and it was often flighty and impertinent: this he attributed to the evil communication of Lady Caroline Mortimer's example;

and, with all his admiration for her ladyship, he could not help thinking that Miss Mordaunt would have been much more unaffected and agreeable if she had not latterly spent so many of her days in her society. In spite of his vanity, he began to be afraid that he had not been fortunate enough to please Augusta; and perhaps he was not deficient in that natural sort of tact which whispers to most people in similar circumstances that they are disliked by the objects of their affection.

This unwelcome consciousness was far from diminishing his anxiety to marry her; but it induced him to defer his intended proposal, and to pursue a different plan from the one he had chalked out for himself before he reached Mordaunt.

Lady Caroline's rejection had taught him to be cautious; he also reflected that there was a wide dissimilarity between her situation and Miss Mordaunt's. Distinguished as the former was by birth and character, had she accepted him, he must have considered that *she* was the party by whom the obligation was conferred; and when she declined bestowing upon him her hand, he knew that his mortification was not a singular one—that he had only shared the fate of a numerous crowd of other ad-

mirers. But when he fell in love with the latter, and became desirous of uniting his destiny with hers, he thought that he was going to pay her a very high compliment, and if she received it graciously, that *he* would still be the person by whom the favour was bestowed.

His pride revolted at the idea of a second refusal, and he determined not to subject himself to meet with such an humiliation from Augusta by hazarding a premature declaration of his sentiments. He fancied she was at present a little *tête montée ;* and as there seemed no danger to be apprehended from any rivals at Mordaunt, he believed he might very safely leave her there to her own meditations. He strongly suspected that, before he met her again in London, she would be come round to a much more natural and propitious frame of mind. Yet all this reasoning did not prevent his feeling excessively provoked by the evident indifference with which she regarded his departure.

Mrs. Mordaunt conjectured what was passing in Mr. Stafford's thoughts, and she was much inclined to remonstrate with her daughter upon the folly of her behaviour; but as she perceived that her guest was merely discouraged

and not offended by it, she was afraid that any injudicious interference upon her part might be more likely to mar than to serve the cause she wished to promote. She therefore resolved to leave things to take their own course until the following spring; and if she found Augusta continued to repulse or to pretend to misunderstand Mr. Stafford's attentions, she deemed that it would then become her duty to admonish her very seriously not to throw away the chance of obtaining so advantageous an establishment.

Mrs. Mordaunt had another motive, too, for delaying her advice. She knew it was most probable that they would see Lord Delmore in town; and she was sure that, if he persevered in avoiding them, one half-hour's neglect from him would make a far stronger impression in his rival's favour upon Augusta's mind, than she could ever hope to effect by all her eloquence. Should his lordship, on the contrary, unexpectedly return to his allegiance, no harm would be done; her daughter was entirely unfettered by any engagement to either of her admirers, and in that case she would still feel quite at liberty to give the preference to the one who had always possessed her affections.

CHAPTER XI.

Say, is there any point so nice
As that of off'ring an advice?
To bid your friend his errors mend,
Is almost certain to offend.

WILKIE.

MISS MORDAUNT had upon all former occasions looked forward to her brother Edward's vacations with the greatest impatience, but she now experienced a sort of undefined dread at the prospect of his return. Perhaps her conscience whispered that he would not exactly approve of her conduct during his absence, or be greatly disposed to admire some of the sentiments she had adopted since they last parted.

When he arrived, however, she felt so very happy to see him, that she soon forgot all her uncomfortable misgivings, and thought of nothing but the pleasure of having him with her again.

The morning after he reached home, Edward

asked his sister if she had seen much of the Miss Stanleys lately? She coloured, and looked rather confused, as she replied,

"No, not a great deal. We were at Estonville for more than a fortnight, you know; then, after we came back, we had Mrs. and Miss Carewell, Mr. Stafford, and some other people staying here, who would not have been at all in the Stanleys' way. And the days are now grown so short and disagreeable, that a walk to the Rectory and back again is quite an arduous undertaking."

Edward gazed steadfastly in Augusta's face, as he observed in a tone of reproach,—

"To sum up all these frivolous excuses in one unwelcome truth, Miss Mordaunt is grown a conceited fine lady, and is tired of her amiable neighbours. Augusta! Augusta! I had heard something of this from Charles; but I would not believe it until it was confirmed to me by your own mouth."

Edward had never spoken to his sister in this way before, and his displeasure cut her to the heart because she was aware that she deserved it. She burst into tears, and several moments elapsed before she made him any answer; at length she said,

"Dear Edward, there is nothing in the

world that would make me so miserable as to forfeit *your* good opinion: if I have already done so, only tell me how I can regain it, and I will promise to be guided implicitly by your direction. I own that I was very ungracious and impertinent to Charles, and I am sorry to learn that he was hurt by my behaviour; but he provoked me upon a very tender point, and I thought at the time that I had a right to cut short his interference in my affairs. Had *you* then remonstrated with me, I believe I should have taken your advice very differently."

Edward was much touched by the strong proof of affection he had just received from Augusta.

"I did not mean to distress you, my dearest sister," he replied, as he took her hand very kindly, "or to persecute you with my advice. I can truly assure you, that all I can ever wish is to see you continue like your own natural delightful self, instead of endeavouring to imitate anybody else, however brilliant or charming your pattern may be considered."

A long and satisfactory explanation followed this opening. Edward allowed Lady Caroline Mortimer the merit of being singularly clever and agreeable, but he shook his head incredulously at hearing her termed a friend whose

judgment and counsel might be safely appealed to.

Augusta, while she warmly defended her ladyship, was not unwilling to admit that she might have her faults like other people; yet she expatiated upon the flattering preference she had manifested for her from the first moment of their meeting. She confessed that Lady Caroline had recommended her not to form any intimacy with the Stanley family, and repeated a great part of the conversation they had had upon that subject—not omitting the hint about their methodistical propensities: she did not mention, however, that Lord Delmore's name had been brought forward, or that it was that circumstance which had principally decided her to avoid the society of persons she really felt so much inclined to like and esteem.

Edward said he was far from suspecting Lady Caroline of intentionally aspersing their neighbours, but that he was convinced she was deceived in supposing they were not orthodox in their religious principles; and to prove to him that he had succeeded in removing her own prejudice against them, he proposed to his sister to fix some early day to go with him to call at the Rectory.

Augusta could not possibly refuse this request.

"And now," continued Edward, "you must give me a description of your new friend Mr. Stafford: I imagine that Lady Caroline approves of *him*."

"No—yes—that is to say, I believe he is one of her rejected admirers; but she thinks him agreeable as an acquaintance, and so do I. He is not at all a sort of person you would like."

"I cannot be sure of that," rejoined Edward, "until I have seen him. I feel very much disposed to be pleased with him, for I hear that he displayed remarkably good taste when he was in this part of the country."

"Oh, stop, Edward!" exclaimed Augusta; "speak no more about Mr. Stafford's fancies. I cannot pretend that I do not understand you. It was a suspicion—a fear—of that to which you have just alluded, which made me feel uncomfortable in his presence when he was here, and which will induce me to endeavour to avoid him in future. I hate to talk of him even to you, except as an indifferent acquaintance."

"I am quite satisfied," said Edward, "and I shall henceforward consider the subject which displeases you as a forbidden one."

Charles at that instant came into the room, and his brother seized the opportunity of

smoothing away former offences, and of restoring perfect cordiality between him and Augusta.

Miss Mordaunt made no hesitation in fulfilling her engagement with Edward, by accompanying him in a visit to their neighbours at Mordaunt.

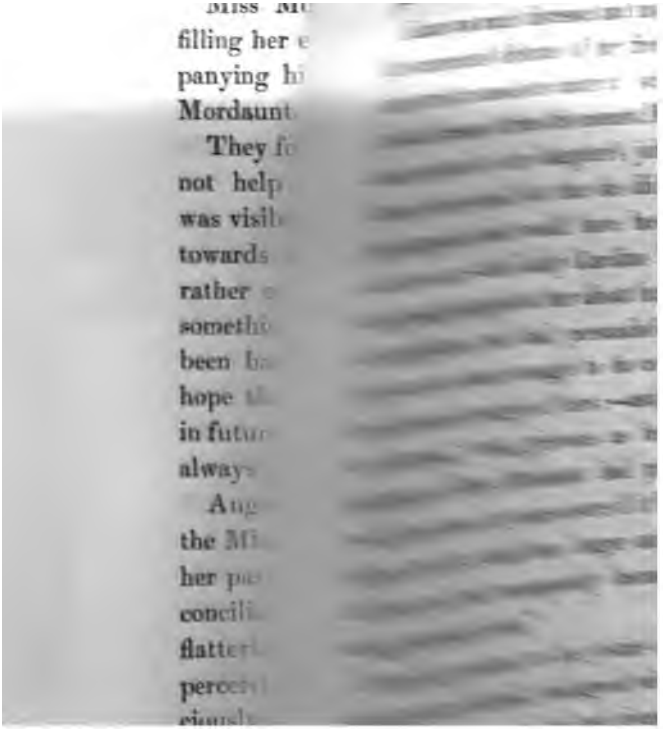
They found them all at home; but they could not help being struck by the alteration that was visible in the manner of the young ladies towards Augusta, — even Laura received her rather coldly; and when she attempted to say something civil and friendly about their having been bad neighbours lately, and expressed a hope that they should meet more frequently in future, Laura merely replied, "that it would always give her pleasure to see her."

Augusta did not reflect that she had given the Miss Stanleys good reason to feel hurt by her past conduct; she looked upon her present conciliatory overtures as extremely kind and flattering, and she was nettled and offended by perceiving that they did not take them as graciously as she expected they would have done. She became secretly confirmed in her original idea that Lady Caroline had been in the right after all, and that the judgment she had

formed of these young ladies was a far juster one than her brother's.

Edward had more than one cause for feeling grieved at the coolness which had arisen between Augusta and the Miss Stanleys. A little observation enabled him to discover that it was very true that his mother had no wish to promote a greater cordiality with the rector's family than proper civility required; and though he strove to make amends for his sister's neglect and Mrs. Mordaunt's frigidity by calling very frequently himself upon Dr. Stanley and showing him every attention in his power, his efforts to renew a warmer intimacy between the two houses proved very unsuccessful. The doctor always greeted him with much kindness, and seemed pleased and gratified to see him; but the young ladies very seldom made their appearance when he was sitting with their father, and their own visits of ceremony at Mordaunt Park were 'short and far between.'

The truth was, after Augusta returned from Estonville, Miss Stanley had remarked that she was no longer desirous to seek Laura's or her society. She attributed this change, in the first instance, to Mrs. Mordaunt's exclusive character;



difference a person for whom she had hitherto felt a most affectionate interest; and she lamented sincerely that a heart naturally warm and amiable as Miss Mordaunt's should have been so easily warped and perverted by vanity.

Both the sisters possessed too much spirit and proper pride to desire to conciliate the good graces of any one who did not wish to cultivate their acquaintance; and consequently they always held back, instead of making advances towards a frequent or sociable intercourse with the Mordaunt family.

Though Laura was not perhaps aware of the circumstance herself, it had not escaped Miss Stanley's observation that Edward Mordaunt admired her sister extremely. She believed him to be a peculiarly amiable, well-disposed young man; yet she felt sure that his relations would never sanction his forming an alliance which promised no worldly advantages: she therefore determined not to give encouragement to an attachment which could only terminate in disappointment, and she contrived that he and Laura should have very few opportunities of meeting.

The day before Edward went back to Oxford, he rode over to take leave of Dr. Stanley. He was told that the young ladies were out walk-

trotted homewards in no very happy frame
mind, for his reflections were anything but
an agreeable nature. He was mortified by
conviction that Laura always intentionall
shunned him, and he was vexed at having bee
unable personally to bid her adieu, when, i
turning a sharp angle of the road, he had th
unexpected pleasure of being interrupted in hi
reverie by meeting the subject of it retracin
her steps from the village.

She was alone (an uncommon circumstance)
she started violently at seeing him, bowed, an
appeared inclined to pass on without speaking.

Edward drew his horse across her path t
intercept her progress, and exclaimed, half i
joke and half in anger,

"As I was not fortunate enough to find yo
at home just now when I called upon your fa
ther, I feel very much tempted to endeavour t
arrest you here for a few moments, Miss Laur
I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you agai

did not receive this intelligence with indifference. She tried to say something civil; and Edward asked her if she would not allow him to accompany her part of the way back to the Rectory, as he could not think of keeping her standing in the cold.

Laura found it impossible to refuse this request: he dismounted, and drawing his horse's bridle through his arm, he walked on by her side.

They both felt rather awkward, and the conversation was at first very much restrained: Edward seemed ashamed to mention his sister or his mother, and Laura looked as if she suspected she was not doing quite right in permitting him to join her. By degrees, however, their mutual embarrassment wore off, and the discourse became more interesting and animated. The young lady thought she had never seen her companion half so agreeable before; and the gentleman was relieved from the apprehension of being disliked by the person he peculiarly wished to please.

Nothing particular was said, no explanation of any sort was entered into by either party, yet a weight was removed from the spirits of each during this walk; they felt happier than they had done for some time before, and long

Edward would not listen to Laura's hint that it was growing very late,—and in truth the were but feebly enforced. He was extremel sorry when he arrived at the gate which opene into Dr. Stanley's garden, for he was awar that he could devise no pretence for passin that boundary. He lingered as if he was ur willing to pronounce those two disagreeabl syllables, "Good-b'ye," and at length h said,

"I am anxious to make you a petition befor we part. I much wish to persuade you to hav the kindness to become my almoner: my mo ther and sister have distributed clothing an blankets to some of your poor people, and do not like to be the only one of my famil who does nothing to endeavour to promot their comfort. You all take such excellent car of them, that it would be both useless and im pertinent in me to inquire personally into the wants; but I should feel very much oblige

will prove most beneficial." And, as he spoke, he drew a five-pound note from his pocket.

Laura did not hesitate to accept the office he proposed to her, and she promised to execute his commands to the best of her ability. She described to her father and her sister her meeting with Edward, and also told them of the commission she had undertaken to perform for him.

Some time before the occurrence of the scene we have just described, Lord and Lady Estonville and their daughter had paid their neighbours the distinguished compliment of spending two days with them at Mordaunt. As they were not much in the habit of going out in this way in the country, their visit caused a considerable sensation; and it was unanimously agreed that Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt must rank very highly in their favour.

A large party of *élite* people were invited to meet them, and Lady Caroline assured Augusta, that "she thought her father's was one of the pleasantest houses she had ever been in in her life"

During her short *séjour* under Mr. Mordaunt's roof, her ladyship contrived entirely to counteract all the beneficial effects which had resulted from Edward's remonstrance and

mistrust the opinions of her brethren and undervalue their judgment.

CHAPTER XII.

Dans un délire extrême,
On veut fuir ce qu'on aime;
On prétende se venger,
On jure de changer:
On devient infidèle,
On court de belle en belle;
Mais on revient toujours
A ses premières amours.

Romance.

As the spring approached, Augusta felt impatient to enter upon the career of pleasure and gaiety which Lady Caroline Mortimer had represented to her imagination in such glowing colours. Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt intended to go to town early,—they had grown tired of the country; but they could not conveniently leave Mordaunt before Easter.

Their neighbours had removed from Estonville Castle immediately after the meeting of parliament; and a tiresome lawsuit, respecting his claim to an estate of some value, had taken Lord Delmore up to London about the time of

part of his time at Lord Estonville's, whose house early habit had taught him to look upon almost as a second home.

Lady Agnes had now rejoined her family; and the first day he dined at her father's, he had much to say to her, and many inquiries naturally to make about his mother. Lady Caroline felt a sort of jealousy at the pleasure it evidently gave him to see her sister, and in the evening she artfully contrived to divert his attention from Lady Agnes to herself.

No sooner had she drawn Lord Delmore into a sort of *tête-à-tête*, than he asked her with an affectation of carelessness, "if she had not seen a good deal of his friend Charles Mordaunt during the winter?" and expressed a curiosity to know how she liked him.

"He came frequently to Estonville," she replied; "and I can easily imagine his being thought a very agreeable person by those whom he wishes to please: unfortunately *I* did not

And even if he was really guilty of the bad taste you accuse him of, I can scarcely believe it possible that he could have made the circumstance sufficiently apparent to allow you to discover it."

"Oh," continued Lady Caroline, "you need not be alarmed about his manners; he did nothing *farouche*. He is far too well-bred a young man to commit any breach of decorum: but there are a thousand little ways of showing a young lady, without incivility, that she does not find favour in your sight."

Lord Delmore smiled as he observed, "We used formerly to laugh at Charles for not having *le cœur tendre;* and his supposed indifference to your charms, *ma belle cousine*, certainly affords the strongest confirmation of the charge."

Lady Caroline coloured. She did not know exactly how to take these words. Could she have believed them to have been spoken in earnest, she would have been delighted; but she strongly suspected the compliment they implied to have been intended ironically. It was in a tone of pique that she remarked, "If Captain Mordaunt is hard-hearted, that is a failing which nobody will attribute to his sister. I am particularly fond of Augusta Mordaunt; she is a most charming companion;

but I never saw any girl of her age who was so great a flirt, or so much disposed to be pleased with general admiration."

Lord Delmore started as if Lady Caroline had planted a dagger in his bosom; but, endeavouring to conceal his vexation under an appearance of gaiety, he said,

"I remember somewhere or other to have read a fable which begins thus:

'In other men we faults can spy.'

Did *you* ever happen to meet with it, Caroline?"

"Oh yes, a thousand times: but I am not in a humour to be affronted with you just now, far less to give you offence. I was going to have told you why I thought it was that your friend had taken me *en guignon*. I perceive, however, that it would not be agreeable to you to hear more upon the subject."

"You are quite mistaken, I assure you; I want to know everything you can impart: so pray proceed with your intended explanation."

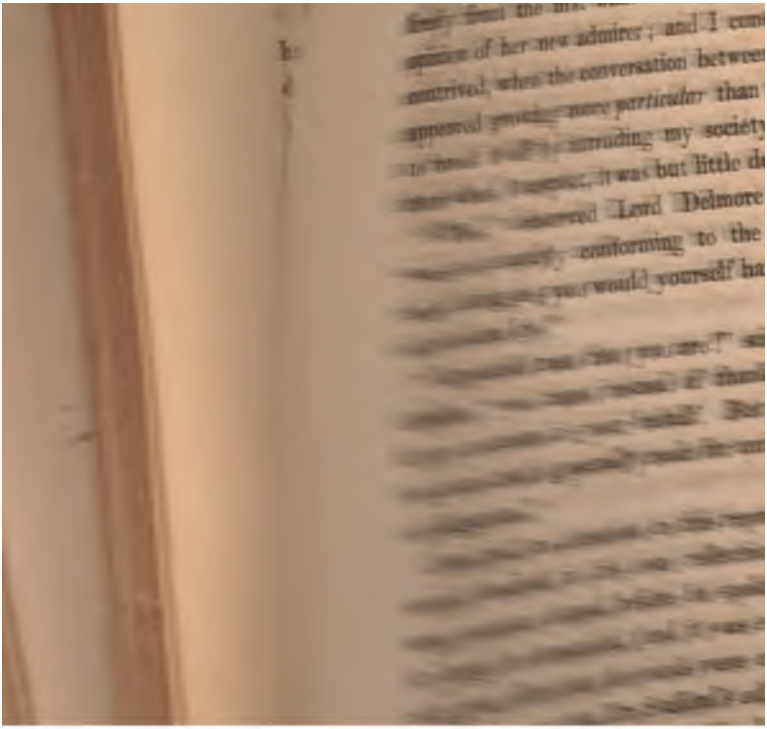
Lady Caroline shook her head, as she replied, "You were in a poetical vein, Lionel, a moment ago; and as you then favoured me with a *Gay* quotation, I will follow it up by a graver one, and request you to remember that

'When ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.'"

Lord Delmore's curiosity had been too strongly excited to be thus easily satisfied, or to allow him patiently to acquiesce in the wisdom of the poet's sentiment. His cousin kept him a considerable time in suspense; and at last, appearing to yield reluctantly to his entreaties, she inquired with some hesitation "if he chanced to be acquainted with Mr. Stafford?"

"I know him well enough," answered Lord Delmore; "but how can *he* have been concerned in the accusation you bring against Charles Mordaunt? Mr. Stafford is a very great friend of yours, is he not? He cannot surely have dared to prejudice an imagined rival's mind, and have taught him to judge unfavourably of you."

"Oh no, no," exclaimed Lady Caroline, laughing; "you have got completely upon a wrong track. You are sadly behind-hand in point of information, if you are not aware that the youth we are talking of has long ceased to think of *me*. The present object of his adoration is Augusta Mordaunt. He spared no pains last winter in endeavouring to render himself agreeable to her; but, for some reason best known to himself, her brother seemed to regard his attentions with anything but satisfaction, and I believe he felt extremely angry



subject, I am of course unable to inform you of the real nature of her sentiments towards him. In these affairs appearances are so apt to be deceitful, that those who pretend to judge very decidedly from them are commonly mistaken. Many people who watched the flirtation at Estonville, and afterwards at Mordaunt, thought, I know, that it went on most hopefully; and if you had not been living so completely the life of a hermit lately, you must have heard some of the reports that were circulated in consequence of their observations. That Mr. Stafford was deeply captivated with Augusta the first moment he saw her, and that he afterwards seemed to be very much in earnest in wishing to marry her, I am perfectly ready to admit; but, *entre nous*, I sometimes doubt if he will ever actually make up his mind to propose to her. I am positive that he said nothing particular to her—that he had not committed himself in any way when he left the country; and this being the case, he may possibly find that he has had a successor in her good graces before he sees her again. With Augusta, the last, or, more properly speaking, the present admirer, is always the reigning favourite. You were so for ten days in Yorkshire; Philip, for a shorter time during her first visit at Estonville;

and Mr. Stafford for about twice as long a period as either, in the early part of the winter. She will probably continue to amuse herself by flirting with one young man after another, without caring much for anybody, until she grows tired of universal admiration. She is more a coquette in manner than in heart; and I feel much tempted to predict, that he for whom she first entertained a decided preference will in the end be the only person who will ever succeed in permanently fixing her wandering affections."

Lord Delmore pretended not to understand Lady Caroline's last insinuations—at all events, he had no intention of admitting her into his confidence; he therefore did not utter a single word in reply to anything she had said.

He feared that the general outline of the information she had given him about Mr. Stafford must be correct enough; but he had more cause than one for mistrusting her authority, and doubting the accuracy of the minor details of her story. He resolved to try to ascertain what was thought and said upon the subject by other people; and he made a determination not to condemn Miss Mordaunt as the decided flirt his cousin had described her to be, until he had had a fair opportunity of observing her

conduct himself, and forming his own judgment of her character. It had grieved him much, when he arrived at Estonville, to find her so completely *liée* with Lady Caroline; he had even then apprehended that she would not escape the contagion of her ladyship's example; and Augusta's behaviour in the evening had taught him to anticipate that her brilliant and dangerous friend would corrupt the natural artlessness of her disposition and manners, and render her a designing and impertinent coquette like herself.

Lord Delmore inquired secretly several times at Mr. Mordaunt's house when the family were expected in town; but he was not aware of their arrival, until he accidentally perceived them sitting in a private box just opposite to him one night at the play.

As he looked towards them more attentively, he had the mortification of discovering that Mr. Stafford belonged to their party; he was placed beside Augusta, and, utterly regardless of the performance, was conversing with her most earnestly. Her face was certainly turned to the stage, but she seemed from time to time to be talking to her neighbour with much animation.

Lord Delmore's eyes became riveted upon

A few moments before he first saw the
daunts, he had been speaking to Philip M
mer, who had secured a place in the same
but had come (according to his usual cus
so late into the house, that the second
had commenced, and some other person
consequently occupied his seat. He was
and angry, and went grumbling away t
the boxkeeper to find him admittance
where. His cousin thought no more
him; but a short time afterwards he rem
a gentleman join the party opposite, an
next moment he distinguished Philip le
forward over the front of their box, as
ascertain what happened at the instant
going on upon the stage.

The following day Lionel dined at
Estonville's. The guests were not nume
they consisted, besides himself, of Lady
and Mr. Carrington, the Mordaunts, and
or four other people.

he forgot the intention he had formed a few hours before of treating her with distant coldness whenever he chanced to meet her, and almost unconsciously he found himself shaking hands with her with all his former cordiality.

Miss Mordaunt was evidently much gratified by the warmth of his manner towards her, and she seemed to feel such unaffected pleasure at seeing him, that he began to think she could not really be so sadly changed as he had apprehended. He sat down by her, and they soon became very agreeably engaged in conversation. Lady Caroline was all this time occupied in talking to her sister. Lady Mary Carrington was but just come to town—they had consequently many *weighty matters* to discuss; and when their cousin entered the room, they were sitting in deep divan far apart from the rest of the company, and apparently so completely engrossed with their own concerns as to be regardless of those of others.

After they had spoken of various indifferent things, Augusta asked Lord Delmore how long he had been in town? "Several weeks," he replied: "I came up upon business, with which I believe I am more frequently tormented than any other person in the world, and I have found it most terribly dull here. I cannot

pretend to say that I did not know *you* were arrived in London, since I sat opposite to you at Drury-lane last night."

"Were you at the play last night?" exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, in a tone which betrayed no very pleasurable surprise: "I did not see you." Then, after a short pause, she added, "I hope you were better amused there than I was; for, to confess the truth, I never was more bored or vexed in my life. I had long been extremely anxious to see Kean in the character of Richard the Third, and when mamma got a box for the play, I looked forward to the evening with the greatest delight. We went early; but I soon discovered that some of our party were inclined to be so noisy and disagreeable—in short, so fond of listening to the sound of their own voices, that I had little chance of hearing a word that was spoken upon the stage. I wish people who have not taste enough to like a tragedy would stay at home; or, if they choose to go to one, that there was a law to forbid their talking and preventing others from enjoying it."

Lord Delmore looked steadfastly at Augusta, as if he was desirous to read her very mind,—to convince himself from her countenance if she

had artlessly spoken the truth, or if the complaint she had just made was merely a fiction invented at the instant to deceive and mislead him. "No, no," thought he; "falsehood and hypocrisy cannot wear a face like hers."

He recollected that, in one of their conversations at Mr. Wingfield's, the subject of which had been the play and the comparative merits of different actors, he had talked to her a great deal about Kean, had particularly praised and commented upon his performance in Richard, and had earnestly requested her to take the earliest opportunity of seeing him in that character.

If Augusta also remembered this — and he had little doubt that she did—the inference that might be drawn from what she had now said was most flattering and agreeable to himself.

As they left the dining-room, Lady Caroline drew Miss Mordaunt's arm within her own, and contrived to whisper, unheard by any one—

"I cannot tell you how delighted I am, my dear Augusta, to perceive that all is going on smoothly again between you and Lionel. That foolish misunderstanding at Estonville has often weighed heavily upon my mind; yet I always

thought that the next time you met everything would be set right: and so the event has proved, has it not?"

An affectionate pressure of the hand was Augusta's only answer. Lady Agnes came up to her a moment afterwards, and appeared desirous to cultivate her acquaintance; but Lady Caroline declared "that she considered their guest her own peculiar property;" and Lady Mary, to whom she had that day been introduced for the first time, overwhelmed her with professions of interest and friendship. Finally, her ladyship remarked, that as this was not a claim of birthright, she hoped she should very soon share an equal portion of Miss Mordaunt's esteem with her eldest sister.

Lady Agnes was not in the habit of making fine speeches, or of saying out of empty compliment what she did not really feel; she therefore found herself thrown completely into the background, and saw very plainly that it was not the intention of her sisters to allow *her* to form any intimacy with *their* new friend.

When Lord Delmore joined the ladies, he observed that his youngest cousin seemed to be excluded from the general conversation: he talked to her for some time, and then approaching Augusta, he said,

"Agnes has just been telling me that she is quite a new acquaintance of yours: I hope you will like her for her own sake, and also because she is my favourite cousin."

"Lady Agnes appears extremely amiable and interesting," replied Miss Mordaunt; "indeed, I think all the three sisters are charming. Lady Caroline is the one of them I know the best at present, and *she* is perfectly unlike anybody else in the world."

"Caroline is exactly that," continued Lord Delmore; "you have defined her character most justly. There are very few people so brilliant and fascinating. She always reminds me of a comet—a wonder which visits us once in a century, and which we gaze upon as something more beautiful and extraordinary than all the other heavenly bodies, but which we cannot help regarding with fear and distrust, as well as admiration. Agnes, on the contrary, may be compared to the little evening star, which smiles constantly upon us at all times and seasons, and which cheers, without dazzling our sight. But to descend," pursued he with a smile, "from such lofty similes to more everyday language, the real difference between the characters of those we are speaking of is, that the one finds all her gratification in

cousins in the light of sisters; and Agnes
particular was destined, as you are proba
aware, to have become so in the most lit
sense of the word, had it pleased Providence
have spared the life of her intended husband

Lord Delmore uttered these last words w
an expression of deep feeling which went
Augusta's heart: before she had time to m
any reply, she was very much startled by he
ing Lady Mary Carrington suddenly exclai

"Is that Mr. Stafford's apparition, or is
in truth himself in flesh and blood? He
the person I just now most particularly wish
see: I have a commission that I want him
execute for me. How convenient it is that
should come in here to-night!"

Lionel and Augusta turned their eyes
voluntarily in the direction of the door,
almost instantly withdrew them again wh
they actually encountered the well-known fig

Mr. Stafford had been invited to dine that day at Lord Estonville's; but having been previously engaged, he merely intended to stop there for half an hour in his way home. The party he had left was a very large one, and he had consequently drunk rather more wine than usual. He was in high spirits, and as soon as he had paid his compliments to Lady Estonville and her daughters, and before he could be persuaded to attend to Lady Mary's explanation or to receive her commands, he walked up to Miss Mordaunt.

Augusta had become very red when she first saw him, but her greeting was now sufficiently cold. He did not seem to perceive this, and, without considering the incivility of interrupting her conversation with Lord Delmore, he brought a chair close to hers and sat down by her.

"As I knew you were to dine here to-day, Miss Mordaunt," said he, "I made my escape from the Duke of Leicestershire's as early as possible, on purpose to have the pleasure of meeting you."

"If the duke could give credence," replied Augusta, "to so improbable a circumstance as *my* having been the cause of depriving him of

the company of such a guest, I fear I should henceforward have little chance of finding favour in his grace's sight."

Undaunted by the supercilious haughtiness of her voice and manner, Mr. Stafford continued,

"*You* must always find favour in the sight of every one. But to proceed to business;—I am extremely impatient to settle a little plan with you for Thursday evening. As you seemed to be so much amused last night, I am anxious to prevail upon you and Mrs. Mordaunt to make another party to the play. I am promised the disposal of a private box at Drury-lane on Thursday, and I shall feel much flattered if you will allow me to place it at your command."

"You are very obliging, but I am afraid I must decline your kindness. I believe that mamma and I have an engagement for Thursday evening."

"That is most provoking; but still we need not give up our party: *ce qui est différé n'est point perdu.* Any other day that you will fix will do just as well as Thursday: any time will be equally agreeable to *me* if I am promised the certainty of meeting *you.*"

All this while Lord Delmore had been sitting

in silence, attentively remarking the conduct of the two persons before him, and evidently listening to every word that had been spoken by each. Augusta found her position so miserably uncomfortable and embarrassing, that she was no longer able to endure Mr. Stafford's persecution.

"This sort of nonsense is quite insufferable," exclaimed she; "I have neither patience nor leisure to hear more of it. I have just recollected that I have several things to talk over with Lady Caroline." And, rising from her chair as she spoke, she walked across the room to the sofa where her ladyship had established herself.

Mr. Stafford was not, however, so easily shaken off; he followed her immediately; and a few moments afterwards Lord Delmore also contrived to saunter carelessly in the same direction, but without appearing to have the intention of joining in the general conversation.

"Lady Caroline," said Mr. Stafford, "I fear I have had the misfortune to offend Miss Mordaunt. Will you have the charity to plead with her in my behalf? At *your* request I am sure that she will not refuse to pardon me."

"I am not very fond of interfering in other people's quarrels," answered her ladyship with a smile,—"it is but a thankless office: yet there is

one comfort I may venture to give you—I think you may feel assured that Miss Mordaunt is not naturally of a very unforgiving disposition." Then, after looking at him with a peculiarly scrutinizing glance, she added, "I suspect you are not likely to prove particularly eloquent to-night; I therefore strongly advise you to wait for a more propitious opportunity of throwing yourself at Miss Mordaunt's feet, and to defer all farther attempt at an explanation with her until some future time, when you may be able to make it in a more collected manner. In the mean while, as you do not perhaps feel quite at your ease in her immediate presence, why should you not go and listen to what my sister Mary has to say to you? She has been in vain soliciting your attention for the last half-hour."

It is most probable that Mr. Stafford did not exactly comprehend the *double entendre* conveyed in some of her ladyship's words; but one of her insinuations was intelligible enough; and, as he was aware that he might himself have spoken unadvisedly, he had sufficient sense left to take her last hint. Affecting to turn the whole thing into a joke, he thanked her for her counsel, declared his determination to follow it, and expressed a hope that Miss Mordaunt would deign to forget his offences.

"Yes," observed Lady Caroline, almost before he was out of hearing; "since you are docile and obliging enough to take yourself quietly out of her way, I have no doubt that she will very readily pass an act of oblivion in your favour."

Then looking towards her cousin, and raising her voice, she continued: "Lionel, come here. I feel that it is a duty incumbent upon me to call you seriously to account for having displayed a signal want of gallantry under my father's roof towards a young lady, and moreover a friend of mine. How could you tamely sit by Miss Mordaunt, and allow her to be bored to death with Mr. Stafford's conversation, without attempting to speak one word or even to raise a finger to relieve her from such a nuisance? She was literally obliged to fly to me for aid and rescue. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"If I am not much mistaken," replied Lord Delmore rather drily, "I heard you say a few minutes ago, that it was not *your* custom to interfere in your neighbours' concerns. It appears therefore, *ma belle cousine*, that you do not yourself practise the line of conduct you enjoin to others. If I had imagined that *my* intervention was desired by Miss Mordaunt,—if she

had given me the slightest hint that it would prove agreeable to her, or that she wished to get rid of Mr. Stafford's presence,—I should not have felt the least hesitation in seizing him by the collar and hurling him out of the nearest window. More than this I think even you, Caroline, with all your chivalrous ideas, could scarcely expect from me; and I trust that Miss Mordaunt, who may not perhaps be so *exigeante*, is not deeply dissatisfied with me for having done less."

There was an air of constraint in Lord Delmore's manner towards his cousin that accorded ill with the tone of badinage in which he had spoken; his eyes were directed to Augusta, and she fancied she could read in their expression that he disliked the sort of attack Lady Caroline had made upon him.

"You have made a much better defence than I expected," observed her ladyship in a conciliatory voice: "so, now be good enough to fetch me those new caricatures which you appeared to be studying just now. As Augusta is so lately arrived in town, it will be but kind to instruct her in the nonsense of the day,—in short, to put her *au courant* of what is going forward here."

Lord Delmore brought the *porte-feuille*; and having done so, he could not resist the temptation of assisting the two young ladies to look over its contents.

Augusta's reflections, after she returned home that night, were upon the whole extremely satisfactory. She felt convinced that Lord Delmore still liked her as much as ever he had done; yet she could not help thinking with uneasiness of Mr. Stafford, and apprehending that he might have the power of disturbing the happy prospect that seemed again opening before her. She was grieved, too, to discover that Lady Caroline Mortimer was no favourite of her cousin's, and that the friendship she had formed with her evidently gave him considerable disquietude.

The following morning Miss Mordaunt went out with her mother to pay some visits; and at one of the doors where they stopped, they happened to meet Mr. Stafford. He looked much ashamed of himself when first he saw Augusta, and appeared excessively desirous to make his peace with her. Her manner towards him was not more discouraging than it had been at Mordaunt, but she seemed very impatient to bring their interview to a

conclusion; and it also struck him that Mrs. Mordaunt's *accueil* was not quite so gracious as usual.

"Was that Lord Delmore who passed on the other side of the street?" said the latter to her daughter, as their carriage drove on, just after they had parted with Mr. Stafford.

Augusta eagerly stretched forward her head, and reconnoitred the pavement in every direction, before she replied, "I cannot see anybody like him, mamma."

"I fancied I caught a glimpse of a figure resembling his," pursued Mrs. Mordaunt; "but I was probably mistaken."

Augusta secretly hoped that her mother had been deceived; and a silence of unusual and rather ominous duration succeeded these remarks. It was at length broken by Mrs. Mordaunt, who observed,

"Lord Delmore appeared, I thought, to be talking to you very agreeably last night."

"Yes, mamma," answered Augusta, blushing deeply; "just as he used to do at Mr. Wingfield's."

"I am very glad to hear it, my love."—Then, after another pause, she added: "As this is the case, I wish to give you a little hint about your future behaviour to Mr. Stafford;

for, of course, you must feel that it can never be right to encourage two persons at the same time. You have only henceforward to treat him with marked but distant civility, carefully avoiding either saying or doing anything that can give him the least ground for offence. When he sees you are determined to persevere steadily in this line of conduct, he will soon perceive that his attentions are not agreeable or acceptable to you, and he will consequently discontinue intruding them upon you."

Augusta looked at her mother with alarm and astonishment. "Indeed," she replied, "this is exactly what I always desired that Mr. Stafford should understand from my manner. He may affect to shut his eyes to my coldness—he may choose to persecute me with his nonsense, as he did yesterday evening; but he *must*, I think, be aware that I never could endure to talk to him except as an ordinary acquaintance."

Mrs. Mordaunt appeared inclined to prolong the explanation, but she checked herself, and merely remarked with a smile, that Augusta ought not to complain, but should submit patiently to the unpleasant penalty thus imposed upon her for being too agreeable.

Miss Mordaunt was very glad to be spared

all farther discussion upon this delicate topic. Her mother contrived to divert the discourse to more indifferent subjects during the remainder of their drive. They stayed out late, and when they reached home, they found Lord Delmore's card upon their table.

CHAPTER XIII.

Sir Charles was evidently struck—
I'm sure he would have popp'd;
But then he saw no more of us,
And so the matter dropp'd.

Song.

Mrs. Mordaunt was not disappointed in expecting that her daughter would make a sensation in London. She came out under very favourable auspices; for, independent of her own striking appearance, and every advantage of dress and fashion, it was known that she had already been much admired in the country, and Lady Caroline Mortimer had talked of her to all her friends as a very charming person, and had declared that she was far handsomer and more highly accomplished than any young lady who had appeared for a very long time.

The consequence of this combination of flattering circumstances was, that, almost before she had been seen at her second ball, she was pronounced to be decidedly one of the new

beauties of the present year; and she was soon nearly as much sought after at Almack's as she had been at Doncaster.

Augusta, like most other people, had a large share of vanity; and she was naturally much gratified by the sort of celebrity she had thus attained, and flattered by the general admiration she received. She danced and laughed with the numerous crowd of young men by whom she was always surrounded, in all the gaiety of youthful spirits; yet there was only one whose preference and esteem she really valued, or whom she had ever seriously wished to please.

Lady Caroline Mortimer took good care to repeat to her, and often with considerable additions and exaggerations, all the complimentary things she had heard said of her behind her back. She told her that nobody was talked of but the beautiful Miss Mordaunt; and she pretty plainly insinuated, that if her affections had not happened to have been previously engaged, she might have had all London at her feet, and have had nothing to do but to make her own selection amongst the numberless aspirants for her favour.

Upon one occasion, when her ladyship had been running on longer than usual in this way,

Augusta shook her head, and observed with a smile, (but it was a melancholy one,) "that in that case her situation would have been too puzzling; that her judgment would have been so sadly confused by the different merits of so many competitors, that she was sure she should never have been able to decide which of them she ought to prefer; and that, after all, she should probably have accepted none of them."

Lord Delmore's conduct had given her much perplexity and secret uneasiness. She met him constantly; for since she had been in town he had no longer avoided society, but had accepted all the invitations that were sent him, and had gone out everywhere — a circumstance which surprised his acquaintance not a little. Yet, after the first time Augusta had seen him at Lord Estonville's, his manner towards her had never been so naturally warm and cordial as formerly:—occasionally, indeed, it became so by short starts, or when he chanced accidentally to be thrown off his guard; but in general it was reserved, and often absolutely distant.

He rather shunned than sought opportunities of talking to her; he was, perhaps, afraid of trusting himself to do so; and, at all events, he seemed determined not to commit himself in any way.

It was very evident that this strange behaviour did not proceed from indifference, for he followed Miss Mordaunt about like her shadow; his eye rested constantly upon her; when she was present he scarcely observed any one else, and when she was absent he appeared so absorbed in thought that he took no interest in anything that was going forward around him.

Mrs. Mordaunt could not quite understand Lord Delmore, and she did not feel entirely satisfied with him. She saw that he was very much in love with her daughter, and she also perceived that he was now acting upon a plan. She imagined that he might wish to subject Augusta to the ordeal of a season in London before he could ascertain if she was a person really calculated to render him happy, or could feel sufficiently assured of the stability of her affection to risk making her a proposal. She resolved patiently to wait the event, and, if things then continued in their present state, to request her husband to repeat his invitation to Lord Delmore when they all returned to Mordaunt. Should he again decline accepting it, it would be perfectly clear that he could have no serious intention of marrying their daughter.

Augusta could only lose one year by this plan, and she was so very young and had so

many other admirers, that it could prove no sort of disadvantage to her, even should the worst come to the worst.

Meanwhile, in spite of all her coldness, Mr. Stafford's devotion to Miss Mordaunt became even more decidedly marked than it had originally been; and her mother, whose conscience was quite satisfied by observing that Augusta herself gave him every possible discouragement, thought that, under all circumstances, there could be no occasion for *her* entering into any explanation with him in order to put a final end to his hopes. She therefore remained a neutral spectator of his attentions.

The evening after the short accidental interview between Mrs. and Miss Mordaunt and Mr. Stafford, which has been already described, the latter went as usual to visit Lady Estonville in her Opera-box. He looked depressed, and Lady Caroline immediately taxed him with being so. He attempted to laugh off the accusation; but she told him "it was in vain to deny the charge to her; that she saw well enough he was out of spirits, and that she was also acquainted with the cause of his distress."

"But do not be too much cast down," concluded she, in an encouraging tone; "things certainly look a little dark at present, yet your

affairs are by no means desperate; you have much to hope from patience and perseverance. I will promise to speak a good word for you to your lady love the very first time I happen to see her."

"Thank you for your kind intention," replied Mr. Stafford, "but I believe even *your* good offices will not prove of much avail. I saw her this morning myself—it was only for a few moments, but when I took leave of her, I shall not easily forget how rejoiced she appeared to get rid of me. I suspect that I am out of favour with her *mamma* too; Mrs. Mordaunt seemed almost as much bored with my presence as her daughter. I had always before fancied that I might decidedly consider her as my friend."

Lady Caroline mused for a minute or two.

"Would you like me to explain the whole mystery to you?" she said. "You do not seem to be aware that you have a rival."

"A rival!" exclaimed Mr. Stafford, almost starting from his chair. "Hell and fury! who can he possibly be?"

Then sitting down again, he added in a calmer voice,

"I beg your pardon, Lady Caroline; I was so completely thrown off my guard by your

intelligence, that I did not know what I was saying."

"I confess," pursued her ladyship, "that your violence rather alarmed me. You run some risk, too, of attracting my mother's observation, as well as that of everybody else within sight or hearing, in no very pleasant manner upon us both. If you will endeavour to compose yourself, and will engage to listen quietly to my story, I will tell it to the end; but if I am to expect a second burst of emotion, I will not say another word."

"Pray go on," continued Mr. Stafford in a suffocated tone; "I will be as immoveable as a statue."

"Well, not to keep you one moment longer in suspense, I must inform you that the knight-errant whose shadow has fallen ominously across your path is no less a personage than our own trusty and well-beloved cousin, Lionel D'Arcy, Lord Delmore."

"Lord Delmore!" repeated her companion, in an accent of great astonishment.

"Yes, it is even so. He was much *épris*, it seems, with Augusta when he met her at the Doncaster Races. He happens to be Captain Mordaunt's particular friend; and upon this

foundation their mother formed the plan of the prettiest and most sentimental marriage imaginable. Lord Delmore and the young lady parted! He was *volage* enough to forget her; and her parents, I suppose, consequently forgot their hopes and expectations of seeing her established at D'Arcy. I heard something of this at the time, but it had entirely escaped my memory, until I perceived the fuss Mrs. Mordaunt was thrown into yesterday when Lionel first entered the room. His appearance has probably revived her former project in her mind, and may well account for the difference you remarked in her behaviour towards you. A coronet is an elegant appendage certainly, but it is not an indispensable one; and her daughter is sufficiently handsome not to need such an ornament. She will be extremely foolish if she throws away an advantage that is within her grasp for the sake of pursuing a visionary chance;—in plain English, if she gives up the substance for the shadow: and, with all her worldly wisdom, this is an absurdity which she seems just at present very much inclined to run into. Lord Delmore did, I have no doubt, admire Miss Mordaunt excessively; and he may—indeed I think that he does—do so still; but he will never marry her. I know every turn of his

character, and you may place some reliance upon what I am going to predict. He will possibly not flirt a great deal with Augusta himself, but he will watch her narrowly when she is flirting with other people; and he will dangle about after her with a most lover-like anxiety as long as she remains in town. When she returns to Mordaunt, he will either go abroad, or bury himself alive again at D'Arcy, and think of her no more."

"You have opened my eyes," said Mr. Stafford bitterly, "to the very flattering estimation in which I am held by Mrs. Mordaunt; but you have not even hinted, what is of far greater importance to my happiness, the state of Miss Mordaunt's sentiments towards me. I suppose I may easily guess that she is too dutiful not to prefer anybody her mother thinks proper to approve."

"If I must speak candidly," replied Lady Caroline, "I confess I am afraid that at this moment she considers my cousin far more agreeable than all other people; but the better she likes him now, the deeper will be her resentment against him some three or four months hence, when she discovers that, instead of seriously intending to marry her, he has only been making a fool of her. All that you have to do,

in the mean while, is to affect not to perceive Lord Delmore's attentions to her, or to understand her own frigidity to yourself; but to continue to treat her with unvarying and assiduous devotion. If you can have sufficient patience and self-command to persevere steadily in this course, I shall be greatly mistaken if you do not find that, long before this day year, Miss Mordaunt will be very well inclined to reward your constancy; and that her mamma will be ready enough to commend her for doing so. Now do not fail, after you go home to-night, to think over very carefully all that I have just said to you; weigh my advice attentively in your mind; and then thank your happy fortune for having given you so good a friend and counsellor as Lady Caroline Mortimer."

She had scarcely concluded these words, and her auditor had not had time to make her any reply, when the subject of their conversation, Lord Delmore himself, came into the box. Both he and Mr. Stafford started, and exchanged a hasty glance of angry defiance.

As the latter did not at that particular instant desire to remain longer in his lordship's society, he wished Lady Estonville and her daughters good night, and left the field open for his rival, to listen in his turn to the artful

insinuations of his mischievous and dangerous cousin.

Mr. Stafford was so apt to be influenced by the opinions of others, that he thought much more highly of Miss Mordaunt after he heard that Lord Delmore had been in love with her. The decided preference thus publicly displayed by a person of his rank and peculiarly exclusive taste, seemed completely to sanction the propriety and excellence of his own choice; and he exulted in anticipation in the triumph he should feel if he succeeded in carrying off the prize from such a competitor.

He was delighted, too, to perceive how much Augusta was the fashion in London,—to hear her beauty talked of by every one,—to remark that those who did not know her were anxious to make her acquaintance,—and to be frequently told that no ball was considered smart if the handsome Miss Mordaunt was not one of the dancers.

He fancied she had acquired a better manner, a more distinguished air, than she possessed when he had seen her in the country; and while he admired her if possible twice as much as he had originally done, he became every hour more desperately anxious to be able to prevail upon her to accept his hand.

He rested much hope in the view Lady Caroline Mortimer had taken of his case; and, mortifying as such a system must have proved to all his feelings, he firmly determined to pursue exactly the line of conduct she had pointed out to him.

Week succeeded week, and while Augusta endeavoured in vain to repel Mr. Stafford's attentions, Lord Delmore's behaviour towards her grew more and more strange and distant. Her pride was piqued, her feelings were wounded. She heard herself constantly praised and flattered as the idol of universal admiration, and she began to feel very indignant at being treated with caprice or neglect—sometimes almost with incivility—by the only person she had ever given herself the least trouble to attempt to please.

"It is very mean-spirited," she frequently said to herself, "to continue to care for one who evidently has ceased to care for me." And had she really entertained a conviction that she had become indifferent to him, she would probably have tried in good earnest to return him the compliment; but just when his manner had been most pointedly mortifying, there was always some trifling circumstance, some unguarded word, which disarmed her resentment,

and persuaded her that she was still secretly dear to him.

In Mrs. Mordaunt's opinion all prospect of Lord Delmore's marrying her daughter had now become hopeless, and she naturally felt that he had acted very unworthily. She took an opportunity of telling Augusta that she was quite sure, from his manner, that he had no matrimonial intentions; and she frequently contrived, as if accidentally, to contrast his conduct with that of Mr. Stafford.

Upon these occasions Miss Mordaunt never tried to defend him; indeed, in moments of irritation, she had sometimes been tempted to do the same thing herself.

Lady Caroline Mortimer constantly hinted to her that Lord Delmore's excessive jealousy was the real cause of his extraordinary and ungracious behaviour; and she could not help thinking with pain and alarm, that if it could in truth be this unhappy passion which made him so unreasonable and disagreeable as a lover, how very insufferable it would be likely to render him as a husband.

It happened that Dr. Stanley was requested to come up to town to officiate at a marriage which was about to take place in the family of one of his old friends. His daughters accom-

panied him in this journey; and the day after their arrival in London, he accidentally met Mr. Mordaunt in the street.

Mrs. Mordaunt was bored at being obliged to go and call upon the Miss Stanleys, and still more so at feeling that it was necessary to ask them and their father to dinner.

She did not find the young ladies at home, but the invitation she left for them was accepted. Several people of his own standing were selected to meet Dr. Stanley; and Mr. Stafford and two or three other fashionable young men were to complete the party.

On the evening of the day appointed for the dinner, Mrs. Mordaunt had more engagements than she could attempt to manage: she intended to go rather early to a fine assembly, and afterwards to a very smart ball.

Augusta was not sorry to think that Laura would see her in her dancing attire; and she anticipated, with a kind of pleasurable vanity, the astonishment her country neighbour would feel when she gave her an account of all her London gaieties, and the surprise with which she would listen to the sort of conversation (so new to her) which she would be likely to hear at her father's table.

Miss Mordaunt's ball-dress was beautiful;

the ornaments she wore were brilliant and highly fashionable; her toilet was finished in good time, and, before she went down stairs, she surveyed herself in her mirror from head to foot with a feeling of triumphant satisfaction.

When the Miss Stanleys made their appearance, however, they both looked so extremely lady-like, that she was half-ashamed of having expected to dazzle them with her own costume: she could not help greatly admiring the elegant simplicity of Laura's dress, and thinking how particularly becoming it was to her.

"Who is that very pretty girl you have just been talking to, Miss Mordaunt?" whispered Sir Charles Parker, a young baronet of large fortune, who had come in rather late. "She has not, I suspect, been much out yet; I have never seen her before."

"No," replied Augusta; "she is very young, and you cannot have met her in town. Her name is Stanley—Miss Laura Stanley; she is the second daughter of the Rector of Mordaunt."

"Laura Stanley," repeated Sir Charles; "the name accords well with the person who bears it. Is she to remain long in town?"

"Only about a fortnight, I believe. It is a

sad pity that she should go back so soon, to be buried alive in a little country village. Shall I introduce you to her?"

The offer was thankfully accepted, and Miss Mordaunt perceived, that in spite of all her boasted beauty and advantages, there was one at least of her own particular set who admired Laura more than herself.

After dinner, Augusta took her young companion into a little drawing-room, which she considered as peculiarly appropriated to her: it contained her pianoforte, her drawings, her embroidery-frame. Here it was that she received her lessons of music; and here she retired to turn over the pages of a new novel, or to amuse herself by studying the list of engagements, and examining the visiting-book, whenever Mrs. Mordaunt happened to be occupied with more important concerns.

Laura admired this room: she thought it very pretty, yet, according to her ideas, it looked rather comfortless; and she had never seen any place so thoroughly untidy.

Augusta showed her an unfinished miniature of herself.

"Mamma predicts," said she, "that it will be a very strong likeness; but of that *I* can of course be no judge."

She then dilated upon the horrible annoyance of sitting for a picture.

"It must be very disagreeable, certainly," observed Laura. "I suppose, too, that your time is very much taken up in other ways."

Augusta related in what manner she generally passed her days, and described minutely the sort of life she had been spending since her arrival in town.

"It is extremely pleasant, undoubtedly," concluded she; "yet at the same time it is a little fatiguing."

"I believe that *I* should find it so," continued Laura, with a smile; "but I am sure it seems to have agreed with *you*. I thought, when I first met you to-day, that I had never seen you looking half so well."

Miss Mordaunt was gratified by the compliment thus paid to her appearance, and the more so because she knew that it was sincere. Her auditor, whose character was perfectly free from jealousy of every kind, had listened with interest and amusement to the animated details she had given her of all her proceedings; and though she was shocked by the vanity she betrayed in these accounts, she felt good-naturedly rejoiced to hear that she had so very much enjoyed the constant succession of gaieties which had fallen to her share.

"I am very sorry you are not going to stay here longer," remarked Augusta, after a pause. "I dare say I could have contrived to have got you invitations to several very pleasant things; and at any rate, I should have been too happy to have introduced you to some of my partners.—By the way, how did you like your neighbour at dinner—Sir Charles Parker? I thought he seemed to be very much captivated with *you:* I assure you he is considered an excellent *parti;* he is very rich, very much the fashion, and he waltzes most beautifully!"

"Since he possesses all these recommendations," replied Laura laughing, "I ought to think myself greatly honoured by having attracted his notice. As I shall probably never meet him again, it is fortunate that the impression he has made upon *me* is not a very deep one."

At this moment a servant came to inform Miss Mordaunt that coffee was waiting.

"I was unwilling to interrupt your conversation, young ladies," said her mother, when she and Laura entered the drawing-room; "but it is growing rather late. Come here, Augusta; I just want to see if all your curls are still in their right places." And, as she concluded these words, she slightly altered the position

of one of the artificial flowers in her daughter's hair.

Dr. Stanley had ordered his carriage in very good time; but he had found the party so pleasant, that he was sorry when it was announced; and Sir Charles Parker seemed also very much of opinion that there could be no occasion for his hurrying away his daughters quite so soon.

"Where are you going to-night?" inquired he, as Laura rose to depart.

"We have no other engagement."

"And to-morrow night?"

"To-morrow, I believe, we are to go to the opera. I have never been there before, and I expect to be very much amused."

"Oh, you will be delighted!" exclaimed Sir Charles. "I shall endeavour to find out your box; I hope you will allow me to visit you there."

The baronet was as good as his word; he went very early to the opera, and he speedily discovered Laura and her sister in one of the centre boxes. It was the wife of Dr. Stanley's friend who had offered to become their chaperon; and as Sir Charles was slightly acquainted with this lady, he felt no awkwardness in joining their party.

He seated himself by Laura, and while he

told her the names of the different performers—pointed out their merits, and explained the story of the opera and ballet, he was much entertained and delighted by the *naïveté* of her remarks, the pleasure with which she listened to the music, and the astonishment she expressed at the dancing. He found his position so agreeable, that he never left it until the curtain dropped; and then he could not do less than request Miss Laura Stanley would permit him to take care of her to the carriage.

As the ladies drove from the door of the Opera-house, the chaperon observed that "Sir Charles Parker was a remarkably pleasant, sensible young man."

"Yes, he appears to be very much so," answered Miss Stanley.

"You have probably known him some time?"

"We met him at dinner yesterday at Mr. Mordaunt's."

Whatever their friend might think, she said no more upon the subject; but the next day Miss Stanley found an opportunity of telling her that Sir Charles was quite a new acquaintance to them, and of asking her confidentially what sort of person he really was. Their kind friend saw at once the meaning of these questions; but without pretending to understand

them, the answers she was enabled to give were extremely satisfactory.

The morning after the Miss Stanleys had been at the opera, Lady Estonville and her daughters called upon Mrs. Mordaunt; and, under a pretence of wishing to look at her picture, Lady Caroline took Augusta aside.

"Augusta, my dear," she exclaimed, "I have the most extraordinary piece of news to tell you: your country friend, Miss Lucy or Laura Stanley, (I never can recollect her name,) has made a conquest of Sir Charles Parker. He fell in love with her at first sight, it seems. He met her at dinner here, did he not? Last night he was with her at the opera, where, I am assured, the case was so desperate that he never left her side for a single instant."

"He certainly appeared very much struck with Laura," replied Miss Mordaunt, "when they dined together with us; but I had no idea that things would have gone on so rapidly. It would be a delightful match for her, and I sincerely hope that it may take place."

"It would indeed be a marvellous stroke of good fortune. But tell me candidly, Augusta, do you think that Miss Laura Stanley is a kind of person who could easily catch the manners of the world,—in short, who could

acquit herself satisfactorily in the sort of society to which she would be introduced if she were to become the wife of Sir Charles Parker?"

"I have no doubt that she could: her manner is yet quite unformed, but it is very elegant and lady-like; and the impression her beauty has now made upon Sir Charles confirms all *I* have formerly said of it."

"Well," continued her ladyship, rather impatiently, "I suppose I must admit that the baronet has shown excellent taste and judgment, and that I shall be quite singular if I do not admire his choice. Yet I own I cannot help being excessively provoked when I see a young man like him snapped up in this way by a little country girl, with nothing in the world but a pretty face to recommend her, while such numbers of handsome people of one's own set—young ladies who possess every possible pretension—are passed over with disregard, and remain season after season unmarried."

In this short conversation Lady Caroline betrayed rather more of her real feelings than she had perhaps exactly intended to do. She was afterwards sorry she had expressed so strongly her disapprobation of Sir Charles Parker's matrimonial views, particularly when she discovered that the danger she had apprehended for

him, if not entirely at an end, was at least for the present suspended.

In walking home from the opera, thinking too much of Laura to attend to his own steps upon the wet pavement, the baronet's foot slipped, and he sprained his ankle very severely. As this unlucky accident prevented his leaving the house for some time, he felt he had no chance of meeting the Miss Stanleys again before they returned to the country; and he had the additional mortification of reflecting that Laura would probably never hear of what had happened to him.

His supposition proved, however, erroneous; as Miss Mordaunt informed her, with many lamentations, of his cruel misadventure, and assured her he was reported to be quite *au désespoir* at being deprived of the possibility of seeing her.

The marriage at which Dr. Stanley had been summoned to assist took place at the appointed period. Laura was requested to be one of the bride-maids; and both sisters were invited to accompany the wedding party to church, and also to witness the smiles and tears of the family of the happy pair at the breakfast which was given after the ceremony was over.

Dr. Stanley's business was now concluded;

he had nothing to detain him in town; and when he took Laura back to Mordaunt, she felt quite as happy, and resumed all her occupations and amusements there with as much pleasure and interest, as if she had never left home.

The recollection of Sir Charles Parker seldom crossed her imagination. She could not be ignorant of the circumstance of his having admired her in no common degree, and she had also been made fully aware of all the advantages that were promised her from such an alliance; yet, when the baronet did happen to occur to her thoughts, she certainly felt no regret at having been prevented seeing him more frequently; her only sorrow was occasioned by the cause which had so suddenly broken off their acquaintance.

During one of their morning visits at Mrs. Mordaunt's, the Miss Stanleys accidentally met Lady Estonville and her daughters. Laura immediately became an object of great curiosity to Lady Caroline, who eyed her from head to foot with so keenly scrutinizing a glance, that she made her feel quite uncomfortable. Lady Agnes, who perceived her embarrassment and was vexed at her sister's incivility, good-naturedly attempted to relieve Laura by calling

her attention to some work which chanced to be lying upon the table.

The kindness of her manner was very encouraging; they entered into conversation, and became so mutually pleased with each other, that, when they parted, Lady Agnes expressed a hope, "that as Mordaunt was not very far distant from Estonville Castle, they might meet again in the country."

After what Lord Delmore had said about his youngest cousin, Augusta had felt extremely desirous to form a friendship with her; but Lady Caroline artfully contrived to prevent her being able to do so. Whenever she saw her sister and Miss Mordaunt talking together, she suddenly recollected that she had something very particular to say to the latter; she often, in a joking manner, turned Lady Agnes into ridicule before her face; and if she happened not to be present, she laughed unmercifully at the strange and precise fancies of her "good, quiet sister."

By degrees Augusta began to think that, with all her amiable qualities, Lady Agnes certainly was a little stupid, and very unlike the rest of the world. She fancied that the peculiarities of her character might perhaps in some measure be attributed to the early dis-

person if she had been born in a more
station.

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sure in her society.

Lady Mary Carrington, on the contrar
every opportunity of making herself ag
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was herself. She invited her and her

tion to do so; and in a very short time Augusta became almost as much *liée* with Lady Mary, as she had originally been with her sister, Lady Caroline.

Perhaps Miss Mordaunt might be the more willing to find herself frequently included amongst her ladyship's guests, because she knew that she was pretty sure of meeting Lord Delmore at her house.

CHAPTER XIV.

—— Many a withering thought lies hid—not
In smiles that least befit who wear them most.
LORD B

—— Bitter, bitter are the tears
Of her who slighted love bewails.
* * * * *
Hers are the pangs of wounded pride,
Of blasted hope, of withered joy.
A LA

THE season was now far advanced, and
parties and breakfasts had long begun,
Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt and their dau
were asked to join a large party of thei
ticular friends, who intended to go dow
water to Richmond, and to dine at E
Island.

Agreeable as the programme of this ex
tion might sound, they had various reaso
declining to be concerned in it. Mrs. M

during the week in which the party in question was to take place, her mother thought she had enough to do without fatiguing herself in the morning.

Miss Mordaunt, however, was by no means inclined to acquiesce cheerfully in the decision which had been thus made for her. She was excessively disappointed at not being allowed to go to Richmond; her two great allies, Lady Caroline Mortimer and Lady Mary Carrington, had been the chief promoters of the plan, and Lord Delmore had promised to assist them in arranging it.

It was probably the knowledge of this latter circumstance which finally induced Mrs. Mordaunt to determine that her daughter would be better at home, and to turn a deaf ear to all her lamentations and remonstrances upon the subject.

The night before the projected water-party, Augusta did not come home until very late; and she had tired herself so completely with dancing, that it was past eleven o'clock the following morning when she first wakened from her sleep. Her ideas were still rather confused, but she roused herself as well as she could; and, before she began her toilet, she walked to the window to peep at the weather. The sun

She turned her head, and felt in
good humour when her eye rested
simple muslin gown which had been
for her. She was far from being in
to go down stairs, and she was not n
half dressed when her maid brought h
perfumed note directed in a scrawlin
and informed her that Lady Mary Car
servant was waiting for an answer.

Augusta tore open the seal of this in
billet, and found that it contained th
ing words :—

"My dearest Augusta,

"Caroline's cold is become so muc
since yesterday, that she is obliged to
going to Richmond. It is very provo
wish extremely to induce *you* to accom
in her place. Do you think you can
Mrs. Mordaunt to be kind enough to
to my chaperonage for this

having carefully studied the sentimen
correspondent, "since you are so e
desirous to be included in this party,
write Lady Mary word, that I shall
happy to let you go with her to R
to-day."

Then re-perusing the note, she adc
think you had better not give up Lady
ball;—she has been particularly civi
about her invitations."

"Thank you, mamma, a thousand t
your kindness," exclaimed Augusta.
do just as you please about the ball;
if it was left to my own choice, I sho
tainly very much prefer going to the
We went to Lady Hunter's first ball, you
she has but a small house, and it is al
crowded, that I dare say she would
rather have our room than our compa
evening."

your putting poor Lady Hunter to inconvenience by adding to the number of her guests; and, as far as I am concerned, I shall not be sorry to have a quiet night of rest. But the moments are precious; it is high time for you to consider about your toilet. The first thing you have to do, is to write and despatch your answer to Lady Mary; and, in the mean while, I will desire that your breakfast may be sent up to you in your own room."

As soon as Miss Mordaunt's breakfast was concluded, a council was held upon her dress; which, after some discussion, was settled very much to her own and her mother's satisfaction. She was in high spirits; and as she no longer felt any inclination to dawdle over her toilet, it was accomplished so expeditiously, that she was quite ready before Lady Mary Carrington's carriage arrived to fetch her.

When she stopped at Mr. Carrington's door, a servant came forward to tell her, "he had been ordered by Lady Mary to request she would walk in for a few moments, as her ladyship was not yet come down stairs."

Augusta thought her friend very idle; and in her impatience to set out upon their expedition, she feared they would be extremely late, She was shown into the drawing-room, where

Post," in the expectation of reading
name among the list of distinguished
at the preceding evening's ball: but
scarcely glanced her eye over the th
lines of the article entitled "Fashion
gagements," when she heard a knock
street-door, and presently afterwards L
more was ushered into the room where
sitting.

He started violently at seeing her,
fancied it was less from pleasure than s
then, as if suddenly recollecting him
inquired after the health of Mr. an
Mordaunt.

She informed him they were quite we
another long pause ensued; which wa
broken by Augusta's observing "that
a very fine day."

His lordship assented to the truth
remark; and added, in a constrained

Augusta told him he was not mistaken; and mentioned that it was in consequence of Lady Caroline Mortimer's being laid up by a severe cold, that her sister had invited *her* to be her companion in her stead.

"I am not surprised," muttered Lord Delmore, in a sort of soliloquy, "to hear this. Caroline has looked wretchedly ill for some days. It is quite time that she should think of taking care of herself."

And, walking towards the window, he remained silent and abstracted. His face was averted from Miss Mordaunt; but he seemed to her to have the air of a person who was revolving something in his mind.

She was piqued and mortified almost beyond endurance: Lord Delmore's behaviour had frequently distressed her, but he had never treated her quite so cavalierly before. Tears of vexation gushed to her eyes,—she had again recourse to the newspaper, which she held up close to her face to conceal her emotion; yet, while she affected to be attentively studying its contents, she did not in truth read a single word of them; and even if she had attempted to do so, she would have been incapable at that moment of understanding anything about them.

like as many hours. Her companion
mained so long without speaking, that
at length advanced a few steps neare
sofa where she had established hers
asked her how many weeks more Mr. M
intended to stay in town, she was ab
startled at the sound of his voice.

"I really do not know," she replied, in
to his question.

"Everybody," continued he, in a
tone, "is beginning to think and talk o
into the country now."

"Yes, it will soon be quite unfashion
be seen in London." Then turning a
head rather contemptuously, she adde
am sure it is very disagreeable to be her

Augusta could not of course see the
sion of Lord Delmore's countenance as s
nounced these last words: he took up
and retreating again to the window, t

"*Mille pardons*, my dear Augusta," said Lady Mary Carrington, as she entered the room; "I am really much ashamed of having kept you waiting for me in this way. You have no idea what a number of boring things I have had to detain me: I began to fear I should never have despatched them all. In the first place, I had several notes to write that required some consideration. Then Maradan neglected to send home my bonnet at the time she had promised I should have it; and when it did arrive, a gown came with it that she wanted to be tried on, and I had to stand for half an hour before the glass while her *demoiselle* was putting in one pin and pulling out another. There is no *supplice* like that of trying on a gown. I was just recovering from having submitted to it, when Mr. Carrington walked into my dressing-room with a tiresome business-letter in his hand, which he insisted upon my reading from beginning to end. I could not understand a word of it, for *I* know nothing of business,—how should I?"

"I hope," replied Augusta, speaking rapidly, "that you have now got rid of all your plagues. Two of them I know from experience to be bad enough, and the last I can imagine you must have found most insufferable."

"Lionel!" exclaimed Lady Mary, as her cousin came forward to shake hands with her, "you frightened me to death! How long have you been here? I did not perceive you till this instant. I trust you have been exerting yourself to entertain Miss Mordaunt during my absence; I am glad to discover that she has at least had somebody to speak to."

"I am afraid," answered Lord Delmore, "that Miss Mordaunt has found me anything but an agreeable companion. I came here with a heavy heart, for I have unexpectedly received a mandate from my lawyer, which obliges me to go immediately to Lincoln's Inn: consequently, I am extremely sorry to tell you, Mary, that instead of sailing gaily up the Thames with you and your party this fine morning, I must be shut up all day in a little dark room looking over musty papers."

"Impossible!" said Lady Mary: "I will not hear of such a defection. Your business may surely very well wait till to-morrow, and we positively cannot do without you to-day. I shall therefore take the liberty of disposing of you according to my pleasure, and of desiring you to attend me to Richmond, *bon gré, mal gré*. You need not look so wistfully towards the door, for

you are no longer a free agent, and I promise you that you shall not escape me."

"My dear Mary," replied Lord Delmore, "there is a certain homely old proverb which says 'that we ought to attend to business first—then friends;' and I am afraid that in the present instance I must perforce follow the advice it gives us to the very letter. The critical and important nature of the case leaves me no choice: I should even before this have posted away to my appointment, but I could not make up my mind to do so until I had personally explained to you the cause of my desertion."

His cousin surveyed him from head to foot with a half-curious, half-incredulous expression.

"Lionel," she remarked, "this pretended business of yours is all a fudge; I am not to be so easily imposed upon. That is not the sort of dress you would have selected, had you known you were going to bury yourself among dirty parchments. The truth is, you have found some other engagement that suits your fancy better than our expedition to Eel-Pie Island; and it would have been far more honest to have told me so at once, than to have invented a fine improbable story to deceive me. You may well look confused. I will hear no protesta-

tions of innocence, for your face confesses your guilt; and I now insist upon your accompanying us as a penance for your duplicity. Miss Mordaunt has kindly consented to join our party in Caroline's absence; and it would be an act of personal incivility towards *her* if you persisted in your determination of cutting us. Augusta, my dear," continued her ladyship, raising her voice, "do come here and exert your influence in persuading this refractory man not to run away from us."

During the preceding discussion, Miss Mordaunt had walked to the other end of the room, apparently for the purpose of ascertaining from the clock upon the chimneypiece exactly how late it was. She looked round when Lady Mary applied to her, and coldly answered, without retracing her steps,—

"I am not vain enough to flatter myself that *my* eloquence could prove of the least avail when *yours* has been unsuccessful; nor can I presume to intrude my advice in the arrangement of Lord Delmore's engagements. I should feel extremely sorry to ask him to do anything that would be either inconvenient or disagreeable to him."

At this moment Mr. Carrington came into the room; he warmly seconded Lady Mary's

remonstrances, but their united arguments could make no impression upon her cousin. At length her ladyship grew angry, and observed, in a sulky, pettish voice,—

"Well, since you are resolved to be obstinate and disobliging, you must do as you please; there is not another word to be said upon the subject. We have already wasted more time in trying to bring you over than we had to spare; therefore the sooner we Richmond people now set out, the better."

Lord Delmore endeavoured to conciliate Lady Mary as he conducted her to her carriage.

"Indeed, Lionel, I cannot feel in charity with you," was her parting remark; "perhaps you may find me in a more forgiving humour the next time we meet. If I should happen to be at the opera to-night, I will allow you to visit me in my box as usual, that I may have the earliest opportunity of relating to you every particular of the delightful party you have lost."

"I do not understand him," muttered her ladyship to herself, in a scarcely audible tone, as she watched her cousin's retreating steps; "he is no more going to Lincoln's Inn than I am. What can be the cause of his taking this sudden disgust at a scheme of amusement he appeared

fecting to talk with great animation
rington; but her whole mind was
grossed by reflections upon the
had just received from Lord Delmo
the moment she had heard him fi
his inability to accompany Lady Ma
mond, she had felt convinced that
did so for the express purpose of avo
he evidently did not choose to be ta
in *her* immediate society. She had li
that he intended her to consider this
a direct avowal of his determination
all amicable intercourse with her in fu
she resolved to show him that she
give up his friendship with an app
the most perfect indifference, wha
vanity might have led him to think
sentiments towards him had formerly

Augusta was a proud girl: she wa
high-spirited to dream of breaking he

were now roused against the faithless admirer who had behaved to her so unworthily.

"Lord Delmore may choose to despise me," thought she, "but there are other people in the world who are well inclined to hold me in very different estimation; and, scornful as he seems, perhaps even his lordship may feel rather startled some few weeks hence if he learns that I have actually accepted Mr. Stafford. At all events, I will carry off my disappointment with a high hand — I will not become an object of pity to anybody; and none of my friends who see me to-day shall have it in their power to report that I have not appeared the gayest of the gay, and the happiest of the happy."

Having wrought up her mind to this determination, Miss Mordaunt spared no effort or exertion, however painful, that might enable her to act successfully the part she had laid down for herself; and few, if any, of her *soi-disant* friends suspected that the gaiety they all admired was only assumed. Had her mother been with her, *she* would not have failed to observe, that if she talked much more than usual, her voice was hurried and unnatural; that when she laughed constantly, it was louder and less merrily than she had ever done before;

and that though there was an uncommon brilliancy in her eye, and a heightened bloom upon her cheek, the expression of the one was fearfully wild and eager, and the colour upon the other was flushed and feverish.

The whole party were to assemble at Whitehall-stairs, where several pleasure-boats were waiting to convey them up the river. The first person who presented himself to hand Augusta out of the carriage was Mr. Stafford; and he also contrived to secure a place beside her when the embarkation was arranged.

She had never condescended to receive his attentions half so graciously as she did upon the present occasion; she did not even refuse to listen to some of the tender professions which her good humour emboldened him from time to time to pour into her ear. He flattered himself that he had at length succeeded in making an impression upon her stubborn heart, and he redoubled his exertions to render himself agreeable to her.

As Miss Mordaunt looked around her, she could not help remarking that everybody appeared as gay as smiling faces, smart clothes, and fine weather could render them; and that all her companions seemed well inclined to enjoy their excursion. A few hours earlier she would

scarcely have believed that what she had then envied them so much in prospect, could in reality prove so perfectly pleasureless to herself.

The circumstances of Lord Delmore's unexpected defection were related by Lady Mary Carrington, and commented upon pretty freely by others. A young man who was one of her ladyship's notorious flirts, ventured to ask her with an expressive smile, "if she felt quite sure that her sister Lady Caroline's indisposition might not be in some way connected with her cousin's troublesome law affairs?"

"Oh! not in the least," replied she carelessly; but in a lower and more significant voice she added, "It was not *Caroline* who was the cause of keeping Lionel away from us to-day."

Miss Mordaunt did not hear these words, but the question which preceded them had thrilled to her heart; and, in spite of all her magnanimous resolutions, she experienced an agonizing pang of jealousy. Could it be possible (and the thought had often occurred to her before) that Lord Delmore's strange conduct towards herself had, after all, been occasioned by his feeling returns of an ill-requited and unextinguished attachment for Lady Caroline Mortimer? Many circumstances tended

"What unusually high spirits
guste is in this morning!" obse
Mortimer to his sister; "she loo
wild, and more beautiful than ever."

"So Stafford seems to think," r
third person; "it is quite fatiguing
always at her elbow."

"She generally appears to me,"
Philip, "to find his presence there a g
but to-day her manner has been un
condescending; it almost might be
to imply that it is not her intentio
demn him much longer to 'sigh a
him in vain.'"

"In my opinion," said Lady Ma
Stafford's case never was so hopeles
people considered it. You may re
told you some time ago, Philip, that i
only have a little patience, he would
succeed in winning over Miss Mo

ment upon the subject than I did. Perhaps you had the trifling advantage of being in some degree in the young lady's confidence, and of thus taking a peep behind the scenes.—But here comes the heroine of our romance; we must either be silent or change the topic of our discourse."

The most agreeable party generally appears to be the soonest brought to a conclusion, and the most tedious day must at length come to an end. Mr. Stafford thought that the hours we have just been describing had flown much too rapidly, while to Augusta they had seemed almost interminable. She was impatient to be at home; she longed to be alone; and in the solitude of her own room to find herself enabled, unseen and undisturbed, to give free vent to those suppressed feelings which had brought her to a state nearly bordering upon distraction. She was delighted when she heard every body begin to hint that it was time to disperse—that it was growing very late. Lady Mary and Mr. Carrington had determined not to return to town by water; and as they had a vacant place in their carriage, they offered to convey Mr. Stafford, who thankfully accepted their kind and considerate proposition.

It was near ten o'clock before they reached

of us wish for a second dinner, aft
fared so well at Richmond?"

Both the gentlemen declared that su
was quite out of the question; and
having thanked her friend for the
care she had taken of her, and the ple
she had spent, requested she would
the goodness to send her home.

"That is far from being my wish
tion, my dear," replied Lady Mary,—'
just yet. You must at any rate come
and have some coffee; and if you are
perately tired, why should we not g
opera for half an hour? You have
that that formed part of my origin
We can talk over the occurrences of th
comfortably and quietly there, as we
in my boudoir; and a very trifling c
toilet will be necessary."

"Oh, pray go to the opera wit

companions, however disagreeable it might prove to herself.

"Everything is now arranged *à souhait*," observed Lady Mary. "You will come with us, Mr. Stafford?"

"I shall be delighted to join you in your box; but though you and Miss Mordaunt may appear there in any costume, *I* cannot venture to do the same. I should be a perfect disgrace to you if I were seen in my pastoral attire, with my coat covered with dust."

"*Au revoir*, then," exclaimed her ladyship gaily; "we have no time to lose." And, drawing Augusta's arm within her own, she hurried her up-stairs.

When she rang the bell to order coffee, her servant told her that Miss Mordaunt's maid had been waiting for her a long while, and begged to know if she should be wanted to dress her.

"You had better send her up to my room immediately," said Lady Mary. Then turning to Augusta, she continued, "This attention is so like Mrs. Mordaunt! Little as her beautiful daughter requires 'the foreign aid of ornament,' she certainly may claim the merit of dressing her particularly well upon every occasion; and she cannot bear the idea of allowing her to be

lord's. But, my dear Augusta, I will not permit you to change your put on anything very *éblouissante;* b doing so would oblige me to follo ample, and that would be an exerti do not feel equal to."

Augusta assured her she had no w that sort of trouble herself; and the proceeded together to Lady Mary's r

Mrs. Mordaunt's maid had lived w many years, and, before their acquisit tune, had waited both upon her and daughter; she therefore looked upo almost as a child of her own.

"My mistress desired me to come evening," she said to her; "she wish be in the way, in case you should be the opera, to dress your hair for yo carry home your bonnet."

"Thank you, Dixon," replied M

with a bunch of pink roses," interrupted Lady Mary, "which came home this morning. It will save you all trouble, and you need not be afraid of its not being very becoming: it will be quite in character, too, with your muslin gown. Send your maid with me, and she shall fetch it for you."

Augusta accepted this offer; and the moment the door was closed, she threw herself into a chair, and covering her face with both her hands, remained absorbed in bitter thought, until she was roused from her reverie by the return of her maid with Lady Mary's cap.

Mrs. Dixon stared at her with an expression of surprise.

"You have been tiring yourself to death, Miss Mordaunt," observed she, in a tone of sorrowful reproach. "I am sure you look much more fit to come home and go to bed, than to go anywhere else to-night."

"I am only rather sleepy," answered Augusta, starting up, and hastily taking off her bonnet and her shawl: "the music and the lights at the opera will very soon waken me."

"Perhaps they will, Miss: but if you harass yourself in this way, you will quite lose your health and your good looks."

"I care very little for either," remarked

...ing be
...ut further delay, and th
...ution of her toilet was speedily
While it was in progress, neither of t
a word; but when the faithful atte
Augusta her scarf and her gloves,
not resist saying to her,

"I do not know what your mam
think, my dear young lady, if she
but *I* cannot feel comfortable or satis
you. I hope you are only tired, and
for you seem to be quite unlike yours

"My good, kind Dixon," replied
"I am afraid you have found me ve
and I am sorry for it; but you have
to be uneasy about my health, for I
fectly well—I am indeed. I shall be
worse to-morrow for having been a lit
fatigued to-day: and I will promise yo
go to Richmond again this year."

Then surveying Augusta from head to foot, she exclaimed,

"How well you look! Your costume is really charming; and that cap suits your countenance exactly."

"If I might venture to take so great a liberty with your ladyship," observed Mrs. Dixon, coming forward respectfully, "I would beg of you not to keep Miss Mordaunt up very late to-night, for I can see that she is much more tired already than your ladyship is aware of."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Augusta. "This is all a fancy of Dixon's, who, in her mistaken kindness, imagines I am killing myself by too much dissipation. You really must not attend to what she says."

"Yet, if you are afterwards the worse for this day's amusement, how shall I answer to Mrs. Mordaunt for having disregarded such a hint? Now that I examine your countenance more narrowly, I perceive that you do appear considerably jaded. I will certainly take you home before twelve o'clock; and, in the mean while, it cannot hurt you, I think, to go to the opera. Just follow me to my dressing-room, and I will give you some spirits of lavender upon a lump of sugar, — an innocent little cordial, which I

the restorative Lady Mary proposed
in short, she liked the taste of the l
well, that she unconsciously swallowe
dose of it.

CHAPTER XV.

Alas! she faints;
She has no breath, no pulse! Guards! lend your aid.
I cannot leave her thus; and yet 'tis better,
Since every lifeless moment spares a pang.

LORD BYRON.

THE first person who joined Lady Mary Carrington in her box at the opera, was Mr. Twiston. He had that instant heard that Lady Caroline Mortimer was ill, and he came to pour forth to her sister his pathetic lamentations upon the subject, and also to ascertain that she was not really in danger.

"I believe I may safely assure you," observed Lady Mary, when a pause in his eloquence allowed her time to speak, "that you will not be called upon to break your heart upon Caroline's account just at present. Her complaint is nothing more serious than a bad cold, which will, I trust, very soon take its departure. She will no doubt be excessively flattered when she hears of the deep concern

Mr. Twiston looked a little abashed immediately replied, in the same se tone,—

"It is impossible to tell you how mind is relieved by what I have n from you, Lady Mary. Such drea exaggerated reports find their way world, that if one does not possess th of ascertaining whether they are true one is kept in a state of torture. Wh *you* here, I knew that Lady Caroline c be so alarmingly ill as she had bee sented to be; and your comfortable has set me completely at ease, and n feel quite happy again."

"May I inquire from whom you your information about my sister?"

"It was from a lady I very little ex meet here,—from her country neighb Carewell, who is come, it seems, to

was in upon the subject appeared very likely to throw her into a similar complaint herself. It would really be almost an act of charity to go and undeceive the poor sensitive creature."

"Oh yes, pray do so, and without loss of time, or one of two things will inevitably happen: she will either go home in despair, and thus be disappointed of her evening's amusement; or she will stay where she is, and expose herself to public ridicule by her extraordinary behaviour. It is very fair that her friends should be entertained by her diverting peculiarities, but I do not wish strangers to enjoy the same privilege."—Then, as Mr. Twiston rose to obey at once her ladyship's commands and the dictates of his own good nature, she added, "You must point out to me whereabouts Miss Carewell is, before you go. I see her now, sitting in an attitude of despondency, and turning her head away from the stage. Those people she is with are her relations, I suppose. Good heavens! what a figure she has made of herself! Yet, when she returns home, she will be much affronted if all her neighbours do not consider her dress as a perfect model of the newest Parisian fashion."

"I certainly never saw anybody," remarked

Lady Mary, "than the gentleman
just left us to go and console her.
fellow-feeling, I suppose, which makes
wondrous kind towards her.—At any ra
glad we have got rid of him: if I
found some amiable plea to urge his de
there is no saying how long he might h
the conscience to infest us with his co
He always bores me to death. I canno
gine how Caroline finds any amusement i
ing to him. As for Miss Carewell, I d
she never really believed that her dear
was seriously ill; it suited her very well
tend to do so, because it looked so pret
interesting to be seen in tears for 'poor
Caroline Mortimer.' She may likewise in
her imagination by making out a most de
ful story hereafter of her own sentimental s
ings upon this trying occasion! But, my
Augusta, we must not forget to watch her

towards her; he has already caught her eye. Now—now he is speaking to her. She half raises her drooping head,—she positively clasps her hands with all the fervour of delight! and, more touching still, she sinks back upon her seat as if she was quite overpowered with the excess of joy! Caroline will nearly die with laughing when she hears the description of this inimitable scene: I would not have missed witnessing it for all the world."

While Augusta was looking at Miss Carewell, and joining pretty freely in Lady Mary's mirth at the sentimental lady's expense, her eye suddenly encountered that of Lord Delmore, which was fixed attentively upon her. He was standing in the pit, and he had probably been watching her for some time: she started and reddened, and a moment afterwards she perceived him return a very gracious smile and bow from his cousin.

"Lionel has despatched his troublesome law business, I see," exclaimed Lady Mary. "He will probably be with us in a minute or two, to inquire if we could contrive to amuse ourselves at Richmond without *his* presence; and, strange as it may seem to him, I think I may tell him we were all so happy there, that none of us ever missed him."

was on his way to visit his cousin.
altogether very uncomfortable; she h
one open the door of the box,—her h
almost audibly, yet turning her hea
look of desperate resolution, she d
that it was not Lord Delmore, but Mr.
who had thus startled her by his entra

The half-suppressed exclamation wh
from her lips at his unexpected app
sounded very little like an expression
sure; and the reception she gave h
certainly rather colder than he had
pated.

Undaunted, however, by these disc
indications of returning dislike or indi
he immediately established himself in
beside hers, with the happy and confi
of a favoured admirer; and Miss M
who was half-angry and half-amused
assurance, soon found herself more
to smile than to frown

the door, he complained of being too sleepy to go out; and Lady Mary, who seldom thought his absence a subject of regret, did not take the trouble of trying to persuade him to change his mind. Her box was always crowded by a succession of young men, and in a very short time she became so deeply engaged in various little flirtations of her own, that she had apparently no leisure to observe what Mr. Stafford might be saying to Augusta.

Miss Mordaunt might have spared herself all apprehension of being that night confronted with Lord Delmore, for he was not among the number of his cousin's visitors.

"Have you and Delmore had a quarrel, Lady Mary?" inquired one of those idle, gossiping persons who found grace in her ladyship's sight. "I hear that he was not with you to-day at Richmond, and I see that he does not now dare to present himself before you. He has been standing in a brown study for the last half-hour on the opposite side of the house, and occasionally directing his looks *à la dérobée* towards your box. In kindness take pity upon my curiosity, and expound to me the meaning of all this."

"That is what I really cannot do, since I am quite at a loss to understand it myself. I

am not conscious of having given Lionel any offence, yet he seems, for some reason unknown to me, to have taken me *en guignon*, and to have made a determination to shun my society. It is a *mortifying* circumstance, certainly; but I will not condescend to pay him back in his own coin, and to be affronted with him in return."

"You are perfectly right; and I need scarcely add, that if he persevere in this mad fancy of avoiding you, the punishment inflicted will not be suffered by you, but by himself."

Not a syllable of this dialogue was lost by Augusta; though, while it was going forward, she had been talking faster and louder than before.

"Everybody begins to suspect the truth," thought she; "but it shall never be known that this haughty and capricious man has the power of making me unhappy. Though my heart may break in secret, I will scorn to show any outward symptom of dejection; and I may soon be able to give what will appear to the world a convincing proof that *I* have not been the disdained and rejected party."

It was while Miss Mordaunt was in this desperate mood, that Mr. Stafford (as if informed by inspiration of what was passing in

her mind) at length ventured to make her a decided declaration of his attachment.

He spoke in a low voice to avoid being overheard by any one except herself, but his language was ardent and impassionate; and he could scarcely restrain within a whisper the rapturous expression of his happiness, when Augusta told him in trembling accents, "that if he could obtain her parents' consent to his wishes, she would not refuse to bestow upon him her hand."

Lady Mary Carrington, with all her apparent carelessness, had not failed to remark what was going forward; and after exchanging a significant smile with the companion with whom she had latterly been engaged in conversation, she tapped Miss Mordaunt's fingers with her fan.

"Augusta," she said, "the ballet has been so brilliant to-night, that I am afraid we have long exceeded the time we intended to stay here: the curtain has actually fallen, and, like a naughty child, I begin to apprehend that your mother will scold us for being so late. We shall now be unable to reach the Room before the general rush; but if we can contrive to thread our passage through the crowd, we may very soon get away, for my carriage is

her own reflections to object to anyth
Stafford hastened to put on her shaw
most assiduous care; and as she place
within his, he tenderly pressed the
which he might now almost presume t
own.

They followed Lady Mary's footst
their progress was soon impeded by
bers of people who were pressing forwa
same direction as themselves, and they
length obliged to stand still until thos
them could make room for them to mo

Mr. Stafford bore this delay very pa
he had much to say to Augusta, and t
a marked peculiarity in his manner
her, which to an interested observe
almost have declared that he consid
suit had been accepted. The young la
haviour tended to confirm this sup
Her eyes were bent downwards, but t
a smile upon her lip

They had been detained some time in the crowd, when Lord Delmore's name was accidentally repeated in a loud voice by a stranger just behind Augusta. Upon hearing it she involuntarily looked up, and an agonizing revulsion thrilled through her whole frame when she perceived Lionel himself standing almost close to her.

It might be uncertain if chance or intention had thrown him thus near her; but they had become so completely hemmed round by the crowd, that he would now have found it impossible to retreat. He was gazing upon her and Mr. Stafford with an earnest curiosity, which led her to imagine he guessed the nature of the understanding which existed between them: his face was unnaturally pale, and the expression of his countenance, though calm, was melancholy and almost reproachful. He neither bowed nor spoke to her; nor did he withdraw his eyes when he discovered she was aware upon whom they were fixed.

This look was more than Augusta could bear: a deadly paleness came over her; she trembled from head to foot, and she felt as if she was going to faint.

Mr. Stafford, who had seen Lord Delmore long before he attracted Miss Mordaunt's at-

great distress. "Good God! what c
for you? Lady Mary, I am afraid M
daunt is overcome with the heat:
endeavour to get her out of this abo
crowd,—to take her, if we can, into the

"Poor thing! I am sorry she sh
overcome," replied Lady Mary, turnin
with a smile: but when she perceiv
gusta's ghastly appearance, her whole
changed, and she added in a serious voic
is indeed very unfit to remain here! A
my dear, I hope you do not feel very il

"I have been rather faint from th
said Miss Mordaunt, almost inaudibly
I am better now." And she was in fac
ning to revive.

The passage before them was no lo
impenetrably closed as it had been, a
few minutes the whole party succeeded
cing their way to the staircase. As Aug

once more, but he was gone; and though, reassured by his absence, she turned her head in every direction, she could not catch the slightest trace of any figure that resembled his.

Lady Mary Carrington had declared that it was her constant practice to walk to her carriage, and she did not deviate from it upon this occasion. Her footman led the way to the place where it was waiting for her; and two or three links ran officiously by her side, calling down blessings upon her ladyship's head, and beseeching her to recollect what peculiarly good care they always took of *her* safety, and to reward them accordingly.

Augusta followed her chaperon's steps almost mechanically. The fresh air had probably relieved her from all remains of faintness,—at least she did not seem to require much support from Mr. Stafford's arm. She walked on at a rapid pace, as if her only object was to get home as speedily as possible: she saw nothing—she looked neither to the right nor to the left; indeed, she appeared to be scarcely conscious where she was. She returned no answer to her companion's anxious and repeated inquiries about her health—it was even doubtful if she heard them.

Mr. Stafford was both distressed and fright-

could ever have led him to apprehend.

They had nearly reached the carria
a momentary impediment retarded the
in the shape of a sedan-chair, which
vancing in an opposite direction along t
ment. Augusta, who had not percei
officious personages who formed Lady
escort, started aside to get out of its w
in so doing ran directly against a fl
which one of these trusty guides had
wards her to point out her path.

Her muslin gown immediately took fi
in an instant her whole dress was in a
She screamed with terror, and extricati
self from Mr. Stafford, whose agony h
rally scared him out of his senses, s
wildly forward, forgetting that a rapid
ment in the open air would only acceler
progress of the flames, and increase h
danger tenfold. The people around he
aghast and horror-stricken

shriek been uttered, when a gentleman rushed from the crowd, tore off the thick rug which covered the horses belonging to the nearest carriage, darted like lightning after poor Augusta, and resolutely arresting her desperate flight, wrapped the woollen blanket round her figure with a powerful arm, and thus succeeded, first in smothering, and afterwards in completely extinguishing the fire.

He did not effect this without considerable difficulty, and before it was accomplished Miss Mordaunt had fainted with alarm. Her deliverer raised her in his arms, and forcing his way through the curious groups who were pressing eagerly forward to hear and see what had happened, he carried her back into the Opera-house in a state of insensibility.

"Where is Miss Mordaunt? — will nobody tell me if she is still alive?" exclaimed Lady Mary Carrington, weeping hysterically, and wringing her hands as she spoke. "Poor Augusta! How horrible it was to hear her shrieks! —they still ring in my ears;—to see her all in flames!—Oh, what will become of me? How shall I ever dare to meet Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt again? They will think it was my fault; they will accuse me of having caused this dreadful catastrophe!"

for he it was whose fortitude and pr
mind had rescued Augusta from a pa
terrible death.

"She has swooned with fright," t
tinued; "but though I am afraid she
more or less burnt, I trust it will b
when she recovers from her alarm,
injury she has received cannot be of a
ous nature."

Then turning to a stranger who se
be looking with much interest at his in
charge, he thus appealed to his aid:

"May I venture to request of you
have the charity to send some one imm
for the nearest surgeon who can be
This lady requires instant medical as
and you see that it is impossible *I* c
her."

"I will go myself, sir, and bring a do
moment I can find one," replied the s

"She cannot remain here," observed Lord Delmore to his cousin: "she will be suffocated by the heat and oppressed by the crowd when she comes again to herself. We had better take her without loss of time into one of the empty boxes upon the ground tier: you will there be perfectly quiet, and quite shut out from all fear of impertinent intrusion."

Lady Mary assented to the propriety of this plan—indeed she felt so helpless and so terrified herself, that she was very much obliged to Lionel for telling her what to do.

He was preparing to put his proposal into execution, when Mr. Stafford, breathless with impatience, and trembling with rage and despair, darted across his path. In his anxiety to rejoin Augusta, he had pushed aside every obstacle that presented itself to his course with the fury of a madman; and he had almost knocked down all those persons who happened unfortunately for them to stand in his way.

"I must see her!" he cried. "Who will dare to refuse me that miserable satisfaction?"

Then gazing for a moment upon her pallid features, and supposing from her deathlike appearance that she was really dead, he added still more wildly,

"I ought to have prevented this. *I*,—I

I can never, never forgive myself."

"Miss Mordaunt is just recoverin
fainting fit," said Lord Delmore, in a
proachful tone; "and if you do not
retard her amendment, and to kill her
nest, you will refrain from expressing
moderate grief when she becomes ca
understanding what is passing around h

Mr. Stafford had great difficulty
manding his resentment; but, under the
circumstances, he felt the absolute nece
avoiding an outbreak. Something of th
kind seemed to occur to Lionel, for it
more explanatory voice that he continue

"I had the good fortune to be of s
to Miss Mordaunt in putting out the
and in bringing her afterwards to thi
I am now going to convey her, by Lad
Carrington's direction, to a quieter an
appropriate spot. When that purpos

Though this last communication was only intended to reach the ear of the person to whom it was especially addressed, it was overheard by Lady Mary. She had remarked with an alarm which restored her at once to her recollection, the furious jealousy that was boiling in Mr. Stafford's bosom, and the haughty, contemptuous manner in which her cousin was inclined to treat him; and to prevent the mischief she perceived was too likely to ensue from their being brought into collision in the present excited state of their feelings, she begged the former, with apparent artlessness, to be kind enough to go and fetch a glass of cold water.

However unwilling Mr. Stafford might feel to leave Miss Mordaunt, he found it impossible to refuse obedience to her ladyship's request, and he flew reluctantly to perform her bidding. During his absence, Lord Delmore carried the still senseless Augusta into one of the nearest boxes, and having placed her with the greatest caution and tenderness upon a sort of couch formed hastily by drawing two chairs close together, he consigned her with melancholy solemnity to his cousin's care. He was then going to retire, with the intention of watching for the surgeon's arrival, but Lady Mary detained him.

" but if I do not stand outside the doo
box, those who come in search of you w
be able to discover where you are."

" Place yourself where you please,
it only be near enough to enable you
me speak to you if I should want y
sistance."

Lord Delmore accordingly took his sta
the passage, leaving the door of the box

Soon after he was gone, Miss Mo
opened her eyes, and gazing vacantly
her, exclaimed in a feeble, hurried
" Where am I? Is that you, mamma, w
sitting beside me? I feel as if my brain
fire. Oh! I have had such a horrible d
but I believe—I hope that it was only a
I thought that I was unhappy—that a te
tion was held out to me—and that in a
and evil hour I gave way to it and seal
own doom. I had no sooner spoken th

rising round me, when some guardian angel took pity upon me, and snatched me suddenly from his grasp."

She paused, and, as if quite exhausted with having spoken so much, she closed her eyes and sunk again into a state of insensibility.

"Lionel," said Lady Mary in an audible whisper, "did you hear how wildly she talked?"

"She was probably delirious; it is not extraordinary that she should be so."

"She certainly was; I hope she will not ramble in that sort of way again, it is so shocking to listen to her! Do you not think some medical person will soon be here?"

"I trust, very soon."

During this brief conversation Lord Delmore seemed half disposed to re-enter the box, the door of which he had completely opened.

"Those chairs," he remarked, "are slipping asunder; I must help you to replace them."

And without waiting for any answer from his cousin, he advanced to make the proposed arrangement. The variation in their position was, however, so trifling, that he had evidently pleaded it only as a pretence to enable him to ascertain from a closer observation what might be the real state of the sufferer who reclined upon them.

noise in the passage startled him acci
and caused him to turn his head, that
trived to catch a glimpse of his feature
deep anguish of their expression both s
and terrified her; and she could scarcely
the evidence of her own eyes, when she
she saw something very like tears actual
tening in his.

" Good Heavens !" cried she, " you i
Augusta is in danger. You cannot
from me your apprehensions. What is
sible to do for her ?"

" Indeed, Mary," replied Lord De
" I have no wish to deceive you; and I
sincerely, when I say that I have not disc
any cause to fear that Miss Mordaunt is
now than I fancied her ten minutes ago.
has been dreadfully frightened, and her
have not as yet had time to recover the
shock they have sustained. Her brain
present confused by it; but distressing

do is to keep her quiet herself, to talk to her, and endeavour to soothe her mind."

As he concluded these words, Lionel retreated a second time into the background, and Lady Mary prepared to follow the judicious advice he had given her. She imposed silence upon Augusta; assured her she had no longer anything to fear; told her she was with friends who were able and desirous to guard her from every danger; and added that, though she was aware she must then feel very far from well, she had little doubt she would very soon be much better.

Miss Mordaunt regarded her with a vacant air, and seemed scarcely capable of understanding what was said to her. At length she suddenly recognized Lady Mary's voice, and it partially recalled to her memory where she was.

The gas had been partly extinguished, but light enough still remained to show her that she had not left the Opera-house. She attempted to rise and look around her, but her limbs were fettered by the rug which was closely wrapped about them; and this circumstance, together with the pain she felt when she moved her arm, brought back to her mind a pretty

"Thank God!" murmured Lord D
"those tears will relieve her, and
good."

At that instant the sound of foots
heard, and Mr. Stafford, accompanie
surgeon, and followed by several of A
and her companion's friends, advanced
towards the spot where he was standing

"Can you direct me," he exclaimed,
to find Miss Mordaunt and Lady Ma
rington? I have been hunting for t
every quarter, and no one has yet be
to tell me what is become of them."

Lord Delmore pointed out to him
in which the ladies whom he was in se
had taken refuge; and said, "he beli
might give him the pleasing intelligen
Miss Mordaunt was recovering very s
torily from the effects of her terror."

Mr. Stafford knocked gently at the do
Lady Mary soon confirmed the

composed; she was sitting with her head reclined against the side of the box, apparently meditating upon the awful situation from which she had just been rescued.

She looked up when the stranger entered, but took no farther notice of him than a slight bow.

Her muslin gown had been entirely consumed by the flames, and both her arms were burnt—one very little, the other rather severely: but her shawl had fortunately checked the progress of the fire, and prevented her from being more seriously injured. Her cap had fallen off, and her hair hung in disorder about her face, which was pale as marble; and her whole figure was enveloped in Lady Mary's silk cloak,—a garment which now proved much lighter and more comfortable than the friendly woollen rug.

The surgeon had been informed of the nature of the accident that had taken place, and had consequently provided himself with proper applications. Having ascertained the extent of the mischief, he turned from his patient to her companion, and observed, "that the young lady's nerves appeared very naturally to have suffered much from alarm; that he feared the burns gave her great pain; but that he must add, that, considering all the circumstances of

look upon such a sight, shrunk
placed her hand before her eyes.

During the operation Augusta did
a word; and though it must have
tremely painful, she gave not the slig
dication that she felt it so. When it
she thanked the surgeon for his kindn
for the trouble he had taken; but she
reply to the compliment he paid her u
firmness.

He suggested that the sooner she co
be carried home the better, and that
present state she would find a sedan
much easier conveyance than a carriage

Lady Mary prepared immediately
upon these hints, and requested him to
with his patient while she made her a
ments with the gentlemen of her party.

She found them all anxiety to hear
port of Miss Mordaunt, and extremely

"Some one must positively go on before us," said Lady Mary, "and prepare them for the arrival of their daughter. You, Mr. Stafford, as the most intimate friend they have here, are the proper person to undertake this painful commission."

Mr. Stafford would fain have declined being the bearer of such unwelcome intelligence; but after the manner in which the task had been proposed to him, it was quite out of the question to attempt escaping it; and with a slow step and a heavy heart he set out upon his awkward and disagreeable embassy.

Lord Delmore had been previously despatched to find a sedan-chair for Miss Mordaunt, and another for Lady Mary; and to send her ladyship's carriage to wait for her in the street where Mr. Mordaunt lived.

He returned very speedily to inform his cousin that her commission was executed; and in a lower voice he added, "The surgeon will, I suppose, walk by the side of his patient's chair, and of course *I* shall not lose sight of yours until you are safely landed at Mr. Mordaunt's door. I shall keep out of the way of observation here, as I should hate to be thanked in public for any little assistance I may have given."

back to Augusta after her conferenc
friends, she found her still silent an
ed; she did not therefore attempt
her, but mentioned aloud to the me
"that she hoped the arrangements fo
parture would be very soon complete

Not another syllable was uttered
of the trio, until Lionel summoned h
to inform her that the chairs were wai

Lady Mary, who guessed what he h
to her, asked Miss Mordaunt if she fe
enough to be able to walk to the do
Opera-house?"

"Oh yes," replied Augusta, "I c
anywhere now." Then detaining h
panion, she continued in a hesitating
"There is one thing I want you to
Lady Mary;—Who was it that sa
life?"

Lady Mary was too well acquaint

deliverer; she accordingly determined to evade satisfying her curiosity.

She said, "she really was not sure who had been principally instrumental in putting out the flames: that she had not herself seen the catastrophe; and that when she heard the cry of fire, she had been so horrified, that she was incapable of distinguishing anything: in short, that all that took place afterwards was to her a confusion."

"Then it was not Mr. Stafford to whom I was indebted for my safety?"

"Poor man! he was, I believe, forcibly separated from you by the crowd. He has been almost distracted ever since. It was really pitiable to see him! He is now gone, by my desire, to soften to Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt the dreadful and unexpected shock that awaits them."

"To communicate to them," muttered Augusta in a bitter sort of soliloquy, "that a stranger heroically came forward to rescue their daughter from a fiery death, after *he* ran away from her and left her to perish. Yet I must not be ungrateful; Mr. Stafford might have proved the kinder friend of the two—he certainly was the more *considerate*."

Lady Mary did not overhear these words;

take any notice of Miss Mordaunt,
she said, be overcome by inquiries
scarcely well enough to answer wit
And, in truth, when she made her a
moment afterwards, leaning upon he
arm, her feeble step and languid
ciently proved that her weakness ha
exaggerated.

Lord Delmore remained in the ba
but kept quite close to the two la
gusta had very nearly reached the p
the chair was waiting for her, when
man, who had heard indistinctly
shocking accident had happened, bu
very little concern about it, accoste
with whom he was intimately acquai
was entering into conversation with
an indifferent subject, just when the
a lamp chanced to be reflected str
suddenly upon his figure. He sta
surprise, and exclaimed aloud

lead people to suppose I am a murderer. You really need not look alarmed: I have hurt myself a little, that is all; the injury is, I assure you, very trifling."

"To judge from your appearance, I should not (if it was my case) be inclined to consider it so. Truly I begin to believe that you must have been the unfortunate victim who was reported to have been almost burnt to death about ten minutes ago. Did you hear such a story?"

Before there was time for any explanation, Lionel had darted forward to Miss Mordaunt's aid. She appeared to be unable to support herself, and without his opportune assistance she would probably have fallen.

"We ought not to have allowed you, my dear Augusta," said Lady Mary, "to attempt to walk to the chair; the exertion has been too much for you. The chairmen can contrive to come here and fetch you—can they not?" And she turned towards her cousin, as if to request him to desire them to do so.

"I certainly did feel a little faint again," observed Miss Mordaunt; "but all I now wish of you is only to take me home. I cannot be better while I remain in this place. Oh! why was I ever persuaded to come here!"

ed, while he carefully avoided gi
opportunity of discovering once n
was near her: indeed, his own agit
excessive, that he was desirous to
self from the observation of his co
everybody else to whom he was k
was glad, too, to find a plausible
escaping from Miss Mordaunt's side
that if she expressed her gratitude
the service he had rendered her, he
be able to command his feelings;
events, he was conscious that he coul
himself to remain with her anoth
under their present circumstances.

CHAPTER XVI.

Antonio.—My lord, a man without, on urgent business,
Implores to be admitted.
Lioni.— Is he a stranger?
Antonio.—His face is muffled in his cloak, but both
His voice and gestures seem familiar to me;
I craved his name, but this he seem'd reluctant
To trust, save to yourself: most earnestly
He sues to be permitted to approach you.
Lioni.— 'Tis a strange hour, and a suspicious bearing!
LORD BYRON.

MR. MORDAUNT had devoted the evening to business: he had taken the opportunity of Mrs. Mordaunt's having no engagement, to talk over with her his last half-year's expenditure, and to look accurately into the state of his pecuniary affairs.

The result of this investigation was anything but agreeable or satisfactory. The alterations at Mordaunt had been carried on upon a great scale, and had consequently, in the first instance, swallowed up an enormous sum of money. Then he had purchased and furnished a very handsome house in town; and these outlays, together

demands he had made upon it.

"This will not do," he said; "
go on as we have set out. You see
we are embarrassed already; and
is not speedily stopped, we shall ve
quite ruined. After having tasted
ment of wealth, the discomforts o
would be more insupportable than e

"I trust," replied Mrs. Mordaunt
need not again be our fate to experi
We fancied our resources were inex
and have consequently been imprude
to allow our expenses to exceed o
Yet our present embarrassment is
a temporary nature; and until we
over it, we may find many ways of ec
without appearing to the world to
difference in our style of living."

"I am very glad that you think
be done. I own that I should wish, i
to conceal from my friends what

encouraged Augusta of late to indulge ideas and habits of extravagance that may become extremely inconvenient and pernicious. Her toilet is more expensive and *recherchée* than that of any other young lady of her age,—at least, so it appears to me. Then, though I might have imagined that her education was completed when she came out, I find it no joke to advance the money to the different *élite* masters who come here every day in the week to perfect her in some accomplishment or other. I was expected, too, to give a ball to all London, a series of parties, and a succession of dinners innumerable, upon Miss Mordaunt's account. In short, I have discovered that a grown-up daughter, and a beauty, is a very troublesome and ruinous appendage."

"Surely, Mr. Mordaunt, you would not wish to have an ugly daughter!"

"No," pursued he with a shrug, "*that* would be far from desirable: yet I own it half provokes me to see a child like Augusta giving herself all the impertinent airs of Lady Caroline Mortimer."

"Augusta is a very good girl," said Mrs. Mordaunt, who felt much hurt by the severity of her husband's censure; "and, if her head happens to be a little turned just now, the circumstance is very pardonable, considering how

miration is a very unprofitable comm
all. It would be much more to the
some of those numerous *adorateurs*
of would step forward and request
stow upon them her hand. Non
seem inclined, however, to pay her
agreeable compliment. It is evider
original admirer, Lord Delmore, has
up all intentions of the kind,—if inde
entertained any. What is your secon
Mr. Stafford, thinking about? I see
stantly in attendance in Augusta's trai
in the name of Heaven, does he no
for her?"

"He would be very ready to do
little encouragement; but I believe he
pects that Augusta does not much lik

"I ought, perhaps, to be the last
blame her for that," observed Mr. I
with a smile that very nearly approa

speaking, will you be so good as to take the earliest opportunity of insinuating to her that I require it of her to oblige me so far?"

"Augusta is already aware of my sentiments and wishes respecting Mr. Stafford, and I have no doubt she will in time learn to look upon his pretensions in the same light that we do; but an unfortunate preference for the faithless young peer whom you alluded to just now has hitherto prevented her from feeling the weight of my arguments in his favour."

"What! does she pretend to fancy herself in love with Lord Delmore? This is really too absurd; and I may well add, too contemptible and mean-spirited, considering what has been his behaviour towards her. Pray repeat to her to-morrow morning all the advantages that would result to her from a union with Mr. Stafford: admonish her to treat him henceforward more graciously than she has done; and, if you still find her inclined to be refractory, tell her from me, 'that it is not the custom in these days for young ladies to be romantic; that such absurdities are now only to be found in novels—they have long ago been exploded in real life; and that I certainly shall not permit my daughter to revive so ridiculous a fashion.' In other words, inform her, that I have some reason to imagine Mr. Stafford

calmly, " to represent to Augusta th
conduct you are desirous she should
and to use all my influence to pers
that she will promote her own happ
conforming immediately to your wi
hope my eloquence will prove success
should I be disappointed, I know y
enough to feel sure that *you* would n
harshly towards your daughter; and
equally aware that, even if you were
to do so, *I* could not have the heart to
her with your severity."

" Well, well, I believe you are right
arguments are generally the most pe
and you must know much better how to
Augusta than I can do. All I ask of
to prevail upon her to become Mrs. St
speedily as may be; since it will be
larly convenient to me, circumstanced
at this instant, to marry my daught

and taking out his watch, observed in a sort of soliloquy, "It must be growing late. The disagreeable business-like discussions, and the penance of looking over those papers, have made me quite sleepy."

"I wonder," remarked his helpmate, "that Augusta is not come home. The opera is surely over before this time."

At that instant a loud ring was heard at the house-door.

"There she is!" exclaimed Mrs. Mordaunt. "Yet I did not hear the sound of a carriage."

Both listened, and voices were distinctly audible in the hall below; but no Augusta made her appearance.

"It is not her," said Mrs. Mordaunt, in an anxious, disappointed tone. "Who can it be?"

"Nobody, I fancy, who is come to give us anything," replied her companion coolly. "Perhaps some friend of the servants. But our curiosity will soon be gratified; the visitor seems to be making his way up stairs."

The door was indeed opened, yet the footman entered alone. Addressing himself to his master, he informed him, "that there was a gentleman waiting below who requested he would have the goodness to come down and speak to him for a few minutes upon business of importance."

"Did the gentleman tell you his name?" [redacted] Mr. Harcourt.

"No, sir: he said that was unnecessary: he [redacted] wished me to give you the message."

"He has chosen a most extraordinary hour to [redacted] on business. The man must either be an impostor or a fiend. You may inform him that it is not my practice to admit strangers at this time of night: and that, unless he will [redacted] me his card, I cannot possibly see him."

Then, as the servant hesitated, he added,

"Why do you not obey my orders? If you linger here, he may take the opportunity of [redacted] the house in your absence."

The footman moved towards the door: then [redacted] with the lock in his hand, he said in



ceived. "Most probably I shall find that my good friend has made much ado about nothing. It is not very unlikely that he may have taken a few more glasses of champagne than usual to-day, and that his judgment is consequently rather confused."

Mrs. Mordaunt could not look upon his visit with the same tranquillity as her husband. She was much alarmed by it. She felt a vague sort of apprehension of she knew not what: her mind was harassed and oppressed by the unpleasant subjects she had just been discussing; and she threw herself upon a sofa, to wait with breathless anxiety and impatience for Mr. Mordaunt's return.

When the latter joined Mr. Stafford, he found him in a state of great agitation.

"We cannot converse here," said he; and taking up a lamp which happened to be standing near him, he motioned to his visitor to follow him to his own room.

Mr. Stafford executed his delicate commission so awkwardly, and felt so conscious of the pitiful figure he must himself make in his story, that his auditor could not comprehend his statement, and imagined from his manner that he had been sent by Lady Mary Carrington to break to him that Augusta had actually perished in the flames.

heavily upon his heart; and com
powered by his feelings, he sunk
and covered his face with both his

Mr. Stafford was extremely sh
had not expected that Mr. Mord
have betrayed so much emotion; b
ventured to endeavour to give him
by assuring him, "that, fearful as t
had been, he hoped Miss Mordaun
tained no alarming injury," he in
discovered the mistake her father
into. He lost no time in relieving
his worst apprehensions, and descri
pretty accurately the outline of wha
pened, taking care, however, to say
possible about Lord Delmore.

Mr. Mordaunt thanked him very
for the interest he had expressed in
ter's preservation, and for the troul
now taken upon his own and upo
ther's account

ing I had been considering the most fortunate era of my life. I had just received Miss Mordaunt's permission to speak to you upon a subject of great—of vital importance to my future happiness. Upon that point, of course, I can say no more now."

Mr. Mordaunt's eyes flashed with satisfaction. "I will not affect to misunderstand you," observed he, as he shook Mr. Stafford's hand very warmly; "and I may truly add, that at some early opportunity it will give me great pleasure to talk to you upon a topic that will, I believe, be mutually interesting to us. At present, I must hasten to prepare my wife for the shock she will feel when she hears of the fearful peril in which her daughter has been involved."

As soon as Mr. Mordaunt re-entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Mordaunt started up from the sofa, and exclaimed very eagerly,

"Well, what did your visitor want to say to you? I thought that your interview with him would never come to an end. I see by your countenance that he has brought you some disagreeable news."

"I cannot deny that he has been the bearer of *much* intelligence,—of very good news, and of bad news; and that you must arm yourself to hear of circumstances that will both startle

pleasure to tell you that our wishe
Augusta's future establishment are
speedily fulfilled, — for she has th
voluntarily accepted Mr. Stafford."

"Thank God for that!" cried
daunt. "But why does she not co
inform us of it herself? to commun
her own lips an event of so much imp

"She will do so very soon. Y
given you my glad tidings, I must n
to you those of a less agreeable natur
accordingly Mr. Mordaunt revealed
degrees the alarming accident that ha
their daughter.

In spite of all the precaution wi
this disclosure was made, she was d
affected by it; and, in the first agon
distress, she implored him to allow her
instantly to seek her poor suffering A

Her husband had just persuaded

step to meet her mother, the latter clasped her in her arms, and bursting into a violent flood of tears, ejaculated in an accent which went to the hearts of all those who heard her, "My child, my child! my own dear, precious Augusta!"

It has been already stated that Miss Mordaunt was more frightened than hurt. There was nothing in the appearance of the burns upon her arm, painful as they might be, that need have occasioned the extreme depression and languor with which she was now overcome. All attempts to make her shake off this fearful and unnatural apathy proved entirely ineffectual. She did not complain,—she did not seem to suffer; yet no light came to her eye, no smile rose upon her lip, and her cheek remained perfectly colourless.

She passed a very uneasy night; her arm inflamed, and a certain degree of fever came on; but still the most unpleasant symptom of her case was the continued and extraordinary dejection under which she laboured. It really seemed almost as if her reason had been slightly affected by the terror she had suffered.

Had those around her, however, been aware how powerfully her feelings had been influenced and excited by the strange and rapid succession of events which had occurred during the preceding day, they would have been at no loss to

Mordaunt's health, and later in the da
sented himself in person at her father'
His vanity was much gratified b
ception he met with from Mr. and M
daunt; but he was surprised and dis
with the unfavourable account they
of Augusta's health.
He was still with Mr. Mordaunt, w
vant came to tell the latter, "that L
more had sent him his compliments,
quested to know how Miss Mordaunt
Mr. Mordaunt looked much surpri
muttered in an under tone,
"Wonderfully civil, upon my wo
tolerably easy."
Lady Mary Carrington had had
reasons for not mentioning that it
cousin who had saved Augusta's life; h
was not therefore at all aware of the i
service the young peer had rendered
the answer he returned to his mes

the noble exertions that his rival had made, he felt rejoiced when he perceived that Mr. Mordaunt remained yet in ignorance upon the subject.

No criminal under sentence of execution ever lamented more bitterly the fatal act which occasioned his condemnation, than poor Augusta regretted her rash acceptance of Mr. Stafford. She felt that, after having committed herself so deeply, it was impossible to retract: she was conscious, too, that she had nobody but herself to blame, since it was in an instant of pique that she had sealed her own fate. Distressing reflections crowded in quick succession upon her mind. Having irrevocably engaged herself to marry one person, she had just discovered (what she had long been endeavouring to disbelieve) that she was devotedly attached to another. That other person's behaviour had latterly led her to imagine that she was even less than indifferent to him; yet in the hour of trial and danger he had sprung forward to her rescue, after she had been deserted by him who had only a few moments before been overwhelming her with professions of the warmest and most unalterable affection. She recollected enough, too, of what had occurred during the scene in which he had acted so prominent a part, to be tolerably well aware

tempt for Mr. Stafford was augmente
portionable degree. She felt, in shor
pletely wretched, that she was ofte
almost to wish that she had been lef
in the flames.

Augusta was conscious that it wa
to communicate to her mother the e
that had taken place between Mr. St
herself; yet she shrunk from the pe
of this painful task. She dared
of confiding to Mrs. Mordaunt hov
she desired to be released from the e
she had contracted: and so muc
mistrust herself, that she determine
to venture to speak of Lord Delmo
should betray the real nature of her
towards him.

Miss Mordaunt spent the early p
day in her own room, but towards e
mother proposed to her to come dow

Lady Caroline Mortimer disobeyed the positive injunctions of her physician to come and see you, and went away in despair at learning you could not be visible even to her. You have no idea of the sensation and interest your accident has created. You ought really to feel much flattered at finding yourself a person of such consequence: it gratifies *me* extremely."

A very faint smile played for an instant upon Augusta's lip, and she asked with some hesitation,

"Did you receive any of these numerous visitors, mamma?"

"I only saw one of them,—the gentleman who was, I suspect, most anxious and instrumental in promoting your safety last night."

A bright blush spread itself over Miss Mordaunt's pale face, and a glow of pleasure animated her whole countenance. "He has been here, then?" she observed: "I am afraid he hurt his own hands very much in his exertions to extinguish the fire."

"He did not mention having done so, and he certainly looked particularly well. Mr. Stafford was always a favourite of mine, but he never appeared to half so much advantage in my eyes as he did this morning."

"Mr. Stafford!" exclaimed Augusta, in a tone of dismay. The sound of his name de-

the sofa in an agony of disappoin
mortification.

She soon recovered herself, hov
speaking slowly and with difficulty, sh

"You said just now, I think, ma
you had seen Mr. Stafford. There
munication I have been most desirou
to you; but last night my memory
much confused, and this morning I f
to be able to set about a long and
disclosure."

"My dearest child," said Mrs. I
embracing her very tenderly, "you
do so now. I am already aware of
were going to tell me. Mr. Stafford
resist the temptation of imparting his
to your father; who assured him tha
our opinion of his character, that it w
us the greatest satisfaction to recei
our future son-in-law: your mind

then appear to us, that Mr. Mordaunt urged me to represent to you very strongly how much he wished it might take place."

These last remarks, which were kindly intended to reassure Augusta, completed the measure of her despair. From her mother she might perhaps have expected compassion and indulgence; but her father's will she knew was a law against which all appeal would prove hopeless. A sort of faintness came over her; and finding herself unable longer to restrain her tears, she buried her face in the cushions of the sofa.

Mrs. Mordaunt watched her for some moments in speechless surprise and anxiety. At length she observed, in a cheerful voice,

"Your nerves have been so much shaken, my dear Augusta, by the alarm you have met with, that I must for the present forbid you to talk upon any subject that is likely to excite you. It will perhaps be better, too, to allow yourself to *think* as little as possible just now upon serious affairs: you may find amusement in considering matters of less importance, though still very interesting in their way; such, for instance, as the selection of jewels and bridal ornaments."

Augusta made no answer aloud. "Jewels and bridal ornaments!" repeated she silently to

herself;—"alas! mamma, how little do you suspect that the very idea of such things is now become hateful to me!"

Mrs. Mordaunt had however remarked something in her daughter's manner which she could not quite understand, and she had even entertained a vague suspicion that she might have repented her acceptance of Mr. Stafford. All her doubts were cleared up by a conversation she had with her husband in the evening, and in a manner very painful to her.

Mr. Mordaunt had taken his afternoon ride as usual, and had also dined out; he had therefore seen a good many people. Having asked with considerable interest how Augusta was,—"I might have heard," he said, "innumerable different versions of the story of Miss Mordaunt's escape, but I fancied *I* knew all the circumstances connected with it rather better than anybody else who was not actually present. One thing I learned, however, of which I was not previously aware, and it is remarkable enough. Who do you imagine proves to have been the hero who stepped forward—by mere accident, as it seems—to Augusta's rescue?"

"Was it not Mr. Stafford?" replied Mrs. Mordaunt.

"No, no; he did not even lay claim to the

merit of such an act of knight-errantry. You must think of somebody else."

"Indeed I cannot guess who it was, unless you will give me some clue to assist me."

"Well, then, it was to the activity and presence of mind of Lord Delmore that we were indebted for Augusta's safety."

"Of Lord Delmore!" ejaculated Mrs. Mordaunt: "is it possible?"

"It was even so. But as Augusta was fainting with terror when he came to her assistance, and as he had left her before she recovered her recollection, I do not believe she is conscious that it was her former admirer who saved her. It is just as well that she should remain in darkness upon the subject."

"It certainly would be much better: yet, from some expressions that escaped her to-day, I am inclined to think you are mistaken in supposing she did not recognise Lord Delmore last night."

"It is of little consequence now if she did or did not," remarked Mr. Mordaunt drily. "She is engaged to marry Mr. Stafford; therefore, of course it is her duty to forget any particular interest she may once have felt for the gallant peer. I must call upon him to-morrow, to thank him for his intrepidity; and also to explain that I had not heard how much gratitude

I owed him, when I returned, I fear, rather a cavalier answer to his message of inquiry."

When Mr. Mordaunt went to make his intended visit to Lord Delmore, it was rather a relief to him to be told "that his lordship had gone out of town about half an hour before; and that he had neither left his direction, nor mentioned to his servants when he should be likely to return."

"It is quite as well that he is not in the way at this moment," thought Mr. Mordaunt, as he retraced his steps homewards. "The next time I meet him, I will express my gratitude to him in the warmest terms that language can supply. I do *really* feel *very much* obliged to him. I would write to him to tell him so, if I only knew where to address my letter."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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THE

HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

VOL. II.

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Dorset Street, Fleet Street.

THE

HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "ADELAIDE."

Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!
SIR WALTER SCOTT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1835.

THE HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

CHAPTER I.

Don Pedro. I have wooed———and fair Hero is won: I have broke with her father, and his good-will obtained.

SHAKSPEARE.

HAD not Lady Caroline Mortimer felt seriously ill, nothing would have persuaded her to have given up going to Richmond. She knew that her sister intended to take Augusta Mordaunt there in her place; and as she was not aware of Lord Delmore's consequent defection, she was tormented throughout the day with uncomfortable sensations of jealousy. She believed she had effectually succeeded in poisoning the minds of both, and in inspiring them with distrust and resentment towards each

other; but she knew how differently they had once been inclined to feel; and she could not help apprehending that some fatal chance might dispel the delusion she had thrown around them, and, by allowing them mutually to see their characters in their true light, destroy entirely the effect of all her artful machinations.

It may easily be imagined that she listened with no common degree of interest to the circumstantial account of the occurrences of the preceding four-and-twenty hours, which Lady Mary Carrington gave her when she made her appearance by her bed-side the next morning.

Lady Caroline was really sorry to hear of the imminent danger in which Augusta had been placed; but all other feelings were soon swallowed up in the delight she experienced at being assured by her sister, "that she was certain Mr. Stafford had ventured to make a declaration of his attachment to Miss Mordaunt, and that she was equally certain it had been graciously received."

"The last news you have brought me," she said, "has already done me so much good, that I feel quite well again. My stupid doctor recommended me to remain in bed all day; but I know much better what is likely to agree

with me than he does; therefore it is my purpose to get up this very moment, and, as soon as I am dressed, I intend that you should take me to Mrs. Mordaunt's. It will be kind to inquire personally after Augusta; and I likewise want to find out from herself what has actually transpired between her and Mr. Stafford."

Lady Mary endeavoured to persuade her sister that it would be extremely rash to disobey the orders of her physician; but Lady Caroline was tolerably firm upon all occasions, and having once taken a fancy into her head, could seldom be prevailed upon to relinquish it. So it proved in the present instance: but it has been already mentioned, that she was frustrated in her desire to obtain an interview with Miss Mordaunt.

During the afternoon, however, Mr. Stafford called at Lady Estonville's; and being told that Lady Caroline was down stairs, he requested to see her. He found her alone; and, actuated partly by gratitude for the good counsel she had given him, partly perhaps by triumphant vanity, and still more by a desire that the report of his approaching marriage should be circulated as widely and as speedily as possible, he informed her "that her charming friend,

Augusta Mordaunt, had consented to bestow upon him her hand, and that their engagement had been formally sanctioned by her father and mother."

Lady Caroline congratulated him very sincerely. She said everything that was most flattering and agreeable; and declared she should never be able to rest till she had seen her dearest Augusta, and expressed to her all that she felt upon this joyful and interesting occasion.

Lady Estonville was too indolent ever to know much about what was going forward in her own house. Her daughter's illness had alarmed her considerably; and she had exhorted her to be particularly careful not to over-exert herself. She was horrified to learn, when she returned from her own drive with Lady Agnes, that the invalid had actually gone out with her sister in the carriage.

"Caroline must suffer from this imprudence!" she exclaimed. "How could Mary be so foolish as to allow her to commit such an act of madness?"

"It was certainly very silly of them both," replied Lady Agnes; "but the day is so fine, that I trust Caroline will not be the worse for having ventured into the air."

Lady Estonville stood too much in awe of her eldest daughter ever to dare to scold her; but she now presumed to remonstrate with her upon her rashness, and to request she would keep very quiet during the rest of the day, and not fatigue herself by seeing any more strangers: for her ladyship had just met Mr. Stafford upon the staircase, as he was taking his departure.

Lady Caroline listened to this expostulation with more docility than usual, and even promised obedience to her mother's injunctions.

"I know," she observed, "that I have been a naughty girl, and deserve to be scolded; but you must allow that there is some excuse for my imprudence. My dearest friend was nearly burnt to death last night: I could not therefore resist going to wish her joy of being alive. Another friend came here for the express purpose of informing me that he was just engaged to be married, and under such circumstances it would have been very ungracious to refuse him admittance. Besides, if I had done so, I should not now have been able to tell you that Augusta Mordaunt and Mr. Stafford are very soon to become man and wife."

Both her auditors heard this communication with interest, and Lady Estonville remarked

that she must write a note of congratulation to Mrs. Mordaunt.

"Oh, no, no!" replied Lady Caroline, "that would be rather premature. The marriage is not yet announced; it was only settled last night, and was told to me just now in a sort of demi-confidence. We must take no notice of it to the Mordaunts until we hear of it from themselves."

At that moment a servant came to ask Lady Estonville if he should say that she was at home?

"Certainly," exclaimed Lady Caroline. "I will establish myself in the back drawing-room," she continued, addressing herself to her mother; "it would be a great pity if you were to exclude your friends because it does not happen to be considered good for me to see morning visitors. There is one lady only whom I beg I may be allowed to receive. I am told she called at the door while I was out, and left word that she would come again. I must not positively be denied to Miss Carewell."

"I never should have suspected," answered Lady Estonville, with a smile, "that poor Miss Carewell would have been the person in whose favour you would have made this flatter-

ing distinction. How long has she been in town?"

"I do not know. Mary gave me such a diverting description of the despair she exhibited at the Opera last night, when she heard of my supposed danger, that I would not for any consideration lose the amusement of listening to the story of her mental sufferings upon my account."

Miss Carewell did not disappoint the expectations of her kind friend; and when she entered the room, she literally overwhelmed her with expressions of rapture and delight at her happy convalescence.

"Oh, my dearest Lady Caroline," she said, "you can form no idea of what I felt when I was suddenly and harshly told that you were stretched upon a bed of sickness!"

Lady Caroline put her handkerchief to her face to conceal the smile she was unable to repress. "This is truly sublime," thought she; but she replied aloud,

"I really know not how to be sufficiently grateful to you for such kindness, it is quite overcoming! I am afraid, too, that your concern for me must have destroyed your amusement in the Opera. Persons of your ex-

quisitely sensitive, affectionate disposition have a double share of sorrows imposed upon them; since they suffer as much, or more, for their friends, as they do for themselves."

Poor Miss Carewell had not wit enough to discover that her companion was laughing at her, and she poured forth a rhapsody of sentiment far too ridiculous to bear repeating; even Lady Caroline at length grew tired of listening to it, and she cut short one of her finest and most touching sentences by remarking,

"How well you look! (forgive the interruption.) You have all the *fraicheur* of the country, which is so soon lost in this smoky unbecoming place. Your bonnet, too, is charming!"

"I am particularly glad *you* think it so," replied Miss Carewell, simpering with delight at the compliment to her appearance, and not a little pleased with the approbation bestowed upon her bonnet. "I did certainly fancy, when I was choosing it, that it was the sort of bonnet you would like. I only arrived in town the day before yesterday; so you may imagine that I have been very busy refreshing my wardrobe, and providing myself with such things as other people now wear here. When one first comes to London, all the gowns one

brings with one look so terribly dowdy and antediluvian."

"Undoubtedly they do. I must give you a few hints upon *les modes*. *La coiffure, par exemple*;—I suppose, you have already had your hair arranged."

Lady Caroline was aware that the profusion of black ringlets which shaded Miss Carewell's face, in imitation of her own, were false; yet she continued to torment her, by advising her to have them cut, and divided in a different form; until, appearing suddenly to recollect herself, she exclaimed,

"By the way, had you left the Opera-house last night when that shocking accident happened to Augusta Mordaunt?"

"You have heard of it then, Lady Caroline? I did not allude to it sooner, because I thought it might perhaps have been concealed from you; but I assure you the horror I experienced when I learned that such a catastrophe had taken place, has haunted me continually. Fortunately I was in a distant part of the crowd, and saw nothing of what was going forward. Had I beheld the dear angel (as many did), with her gown all in flames, and looking wild with agony, I believe the sight would have killed me! My first idea, when I began to

poor Lady Mary was able to sup

"Your consideration for me
ment," pursued Lady Caroline,
most admirable. As for Mary, th
was peculiarly distressing for her,
ed to be still much shaken by it
They all flattered themselves la
Augusta was not seriously hurt;
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different one."

"So I thought," remarked M
in a confidential, melancholy tone.
I went to Mrs. Mordaunt's to
was. I was told that her mother
but I requested that her maid wo
enough to come and speak to me
sorry to say that she reported her
to be in a very low, uncomfortabl
I was leaving the house, I met
Lord Delmore's going into it; and
that it had not been

in raptures of his gallant, noble behaviour; I am sure you must feel quite proud of the distinction he has so deservedly gained."

Agreeable as it might be to Lady Caroline to hear Lionel praised, she could not dwell with complacency upon the idea of the commendations he had merited for his exertions in Augusta Mordaunt's cause; it maddened her even to think of them.

She had listened with jealous agony to Lady Mary's account of his conduct, but she had not patience to attend to Miss Carewell's comments upon so galling a subject. She had too much prudence however to betray her feelings, and, without losing her self-command,

"Lionel is a fine, spirited creature," she said, very warmly; "he always had more coolness, as well as more courage, than anybody I ever knew. And as Captain Mordaunt is his particular friend, it must be very pleasant to him to have rendered so material a service to his sister."

"His reflections must indeed be most enviable! How curious it would be if the impression left by this fearful accident—the vivid recollection of a great and interesting benefit conferred and received, were to give rise to a mutual and tender attachment between your noble cousin and Augusta Mordaunt!"

"Unluckily I am in possession of a secret," replied Lady Caroline, very drily, "which must destroy the charming little romance you have been so prettily imagining. I happen to know that Augusta Mordaunt is engaged to be married."

Before Miss Carewell had time to recover from the astonishment into which this announcement had thrown her, Philip Mortimer walked into the room. He bowed to her stiffly, but civilly; and then turning to his sister, he said, "Though I come to see you so late, Caroline, I hope you give me credit for having inquired after you long before this time of day. I was told that you did not admit visitors; but of course I did not consider that *I* could be excluded as coming under that denomination."

"Indeed I should have been very much offended with you if you had. You perceive, too, that I am not so great an invalid as to be unable to make one exception to the general rule which has been prescribed for my observance."

"It would have been extremely hard-hearted," replied Philip, "to have condemned you to solitude; and it is quite right, as well as judicious, to have given the private *entrée* to Miss Carewell. I have no doubt you have

found her a very entertaining companion. I have been sitting with Mary, and hearing from her the authentic particulars of the alarming scene that took place last night. I called upon Delmore too, to ask with due cousinly solicitude how he felt this morning; but he was not visible. I hope Stafford will go in person to thank him for his very disinterested kindness in snatching Miss Mordaunt out of the flames. If he does, I should like to be present at the interview. Those who are unwary enough to interfere in promoting a separation between man and wife, are sometimes figuratively said to burn their fingers; and, if report speaks true, Delmore has done so literally, in his exertions to bring *Promis* and *Promise* happily together again."

"Is he really hurt?" inquired Lady Caroline, with unaffected anxiety.

"Not much, I suspect," answered her brother.

No syllable of this conversation was lost upon Miss Carewell, though she little guessed that Philip's observations had been framed expressly for her edification. Not having any excuse for prolonging her visit, she rose to take leave of her "dear friend;" and, as soon as she was fairly out of hearing, Lady Caroline indulged her satirical mirth very freely at her expense.

"It is a great blessing," said Philip, "to have got rid of the Carewell. I thought she never meant to depart. You and I have many things to talk over; and as it is not necessary to admit her into our counsel, if she had had the indiscretion to stay here much longer, we should have found her company sadly *de trop*."

A long and interesting discussion accordingly took place between the amiable brother and sister, but it was of so strictly secret and confidential a nature, that it would almost amount to an act of treachery to publish even the subjects it referred to.

Several days passed, and Miss Mordaunt's arm grew so much better that her mother began to hope it would not be disfigured by a scar. Yet the improvement in her health proceeded very slowly, at least she was unwilling to admit that she felt much amendment. A physician, as well as a surgeon, had been called in to attend her; and the former at length told Mrs. Mordaunt "that he could not exactly make out what was the matter with her daughter; that she had no decided complaint; and that he was strongly inclined to suspect her indisposition arose from her having something that preyed upon her mind."

Mrs. Mordaunt had already been secretly of

the same opinion; but when she mentioned the idea to her husband, she found him disposed to treat it with ridicule and disregard.

"Nonsense!" said he; "Augusta has been almost frightened to death, and she cannot get over the impression of her alarm: but you really ought not to give way to her fancies. It is high time she should consider herself well enough to see some of her friends; quiet society would do her more good than moping in solitude from morning till night. At any rate, I must insist upon her receiving Mr. Stafford to-morrow. Here he comes day after day, with a long lover-like face, boring me with his interminable visits, and pleading for an interview with his betrothed. Augusta must positively take the trouble of entertaining him herself, for I am thoroughly weary of the task. As soon as the settlements are fairly put *en train*, we will go down to Mordaunt: country air will be very reviving to our invalid's health; and woods and groves will be much more appropriate scenes for tender speeches, than crowded rooms and dusty streets."

Mrs. Mordaunt felt in some degree the truth of this reasoning; and as she saw that her own arguments would make no impression upon Mr. Mordaunt, she determined to endeavour to

to see her friend Lady Caroline
thought it could not now do her
have a comfortable little gossip w

Ever since the party at Richm
had felt a mistrust both of Lady
of Lady Mary Carrington; an un
picion haunted her mind that they
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declining to see her.

Having gained her first point,
daunt resolved to pursue her advant

"I have a petition to present t
said, playfully, "and it is in behalf
who is not, I suspect, very likely to
a refusal from *you*. Mr. Stafford is
anxious to learn when you will

And, as she spoke, she glanced her eye towards the dressing-gown she had continued to wear ever since her accident.

Mrs. Mordaunt could not help smiling at her daughter's ingenious *ruse*.

"I certainly had no intention," she answered, "of suggesting such an impropriety. It is not necessary that you should always remain *en robe de chambre;* there cannot be the least objection to your putting on a gown to-morrow morning."

As Augusta considered herself bound to fulfil her engagement to Mr. Stafford, she felt the absurdity of attempting longer to shun his society. She had just expressed her readiness to be guided by her mother's suggestions, when a servant tapped at the door, and informed his mistress "that Lady Caroline Mortimer begged to know how Miss Mordaunt did; and was waiting herself for the answer to her inquiry."

"Tell her ladyship," said Mrs. Mordaunt, "that if she has time to come in, we shall be very happy to see her."

And accordingly, almost before it seemed possible that the message could have been delivered, Lady Caroline, with a quick but noiseless step, had entered the room.

With a gentleness and an *empressement* which

appeared to proceed from the most affectionate consideration, she placed herself quietly beside Augusta, looked long and earnestly in her face, and then, in a subdued and anxious tone, began asking her about her arm, and about the amendment of her health.

Her ladyship was an excellent actress, and upon this occasion she played her part to perfection. There was an affected kindness, a sort of fascination in the deep interest she professed to feel for her friend, which gratified Augusta extremely, and in a short time entirely removed all her former doubts of her sincerity and good faith. Indeed, so completely was she taken in by her present artful and delicate flattery, that she reproached herself severely for ever having entertained a thought to her disadvantage.

Mrs. Mordaunt, who had had little leisure since her daughter's illness, was glad to find an opportunity of answering a letter: she retired to the opposite end of the room, and thus left the two young ladies to enjoy a *tête-à-tête*.

Lady Caroline amused Augusta for some time by relating different little anecdotes which had occurred during the period she had been confined to the house.

"I considered it a sort of duty," she said, at length, "to put you *au courant* of what has

passed. My budget of gossip is entirely exhausted; and now have *you* no interesting intelligence, my dearest Augusta, to communicate to me in return for all my news?"

And as she concluded these words, her ladyship looked very significantly at her companion. Augusta shrunk beneath her penetrating glance: she blushed, hesitated, and replied in an embarrassed voice—

"You always know so soon and so accurately every circumstance that happens in the world, that I can scarcely hope to be able to tell you anything with which you are not already perfectly acquainted."

"It would be very uncivil to contradict you, my dear," pursued Lady Caroline, "by pretending to deny that I do now and then possess the art of taking a little peep behind the scenes, and discovering what is going forward rather earlier than other people. But I can lay claim to no merit of this kind when I allude to an event which has been pretty generally spoken of in the world for two or three days past; and which is, I must add, so peculiarly interesting to *me*, that I have scarcely been able to think of anything else. Since your modesty forbids you to announce to me in plain terms that you are going to be married, may I not consider

your insinuation just now as a challenge, at least a permission, to me to offer you my warmest and most heartfelt congratulations?"

And acting upon the old-fashioned assumption that "silence implies consent," she proceeded to enlarge upon the subject with great feeling and eloquence. She said all that was pretty, judicious, and agreeable to say upon such an occasion; contrived to bring out into the strongest light every favourable and flattering point in Mr. Stafford's character; and, after expressing with well-feigned sincerity "the real esteem she had always entertained for him," declared that "upon *his* account she felt very truly rejoiced at the happiness which awaited him." Nor did she neglect incidentally to enumerate all the advantageous circumstances which would naturally result to her friend from an alliance with a young man of immense fortune, high fashion, and deserved popularity; and to illustrate more forcibly the comfort and independence secured by such a marriage, she instanced the example of her own sister, Lady Mary Carrington.

Augusta was unable to resist the powerful influence which Lady Caroline possessed over her mind. She was carried away by her specious arguments, and dazzled by the bright

picture she had placed before her imagination, until she began by degrees to think that her matrimonial prospect was not, after all, quite an unenviable one; and that, if she had never seen Lord Delmore, she might perhaps have felt far less unhappy at the idea of becoming the bride of Mr. Stafford.

Her wily companion perceived the impression she had made, and rang the bell to order her carriage. Like a skilful general, she was desirous to effect her retreat at the favourable moment, and to leave Augusta to reflect in her present disposition upon all she had suggested to her in the conversation that had just taken place between them.

Miss Mordaunt's first meeting with Mr. Stafford was very far from going off as satisfactorily to either of the parties concerned, as the interview already described. Before his arrival Augusta had made up her mind to receive her admirer very graciously; but the sight of him revived her indignation against him for having abandoned her in the moment of danger, and the *abord* she gave him was consequently sufficiently frigid and unflattering.

Mr. Stafford had expected a very different welcome, and he was unable to conceal his mortification. He felt an uncomfortable suspicion

solicitude about her health, or
her the anguish her alarm and
had occasioned him.

At length he found his situat
and so hopeless, that he turne
look towards Mrs. Mordaunt;
wishing her to retire, and gra
vate conference with his lady-lo
thankful to her when she came f
relief, and began talking at onc
for him.

By degrees Augusta joined la
discussion; but she was either ill,
be so, and this afforded him a
shortening a visit that was evide
able to them both.

Before he took his departure,
found courage to say, "I cam
Mordaunt, with the hope of rem
our last conversation

ness to what I am so anxious to say to you; and I assure you that I reproach myself severely for having forced myself into your presence before you are sufficiently recovered to receive visitors without annoyance. I shall not torment you by attempting to see you again until you are good enough to let me know that my company will be agreeable to you."

Augusta was much startled by the tone of this remonstrance: she feared that she had carried her coldness too far; and she was beginning something like an apology, when her mother interrupted her.

"*I* am the person in fault," she said, addressing herself to Mr. Stafford. "Augusta told me this morning that she did not feel at all equal to receiving you; that she had fatigued herself yesterday by talking too long to Lady Caroline Mortimer. I fancied, however, that she was stronger than she imagined; and, yielding to your importunity, I persuaded her to admit you. I now find that I should have acted more wisely if I had counselled you to delay your meeting another day. I will keep my poor nervous invalid quite quiet this afternoon, and to-morrow you must look in upon us again."

"I shall certainly be most happy to do so,"

replied Mr. Stafford, rather haughtily, "if Miss Mordaunt condescends to join you in your invitation."

"Yes, pray come to-morrow," added Augusta, extending her hand towards him as she spoke, "to prove that you are not still angry with me."

Mr. Stafford was in some degree conciliated; yet his vanity had been so deeply wounded by her behaviour, that he could not disguise that he had been, and yet was, extremely indignant with her.

Mrs. Mordaunt followed him out of the room. "I perceive," exclaimed she, "that you are foolish enough to be offended with Augusta, because you have mistaken for coldness what was in fact nothing but the languor of disease."

"It may be so, Mrs. Mordaunt, but my feelings have been hurt in a manner I little expected. I am most unwilling to judge hastily or unjustly of a person I wish to consider more enchanting than almost all the rest of the world. After I have seen her once again, I shall be better able to know what opinion I ought to form of the reception she has now given me. I can bear any disappointment, endure any pain, but I cannot patiently submit

to be trifled with." And without waiting to hear another word, he hurried down stairs.

Mrs. Mordaunt's eyes followed him sorrowfully. "This will never do," thought she: "he has departed in wrath, and I must own that he has met with sufficient provocation." She paused for a few moments to collect her ideas and regain her composure before she returned to her daughter, who was sitting with downcast looks, and evidently appearing very uneasy and very much ashamed of herself. "I am not going to reproach you, my dear," said she kindly, "but rather to advise you. I am sure you will not refuse to admit me into your confidence, and to tell me truly what induced you to treat Mr. Stafford so ungraciously this morning."

"I am aware," replied Augusta in a humble voice, "that I have done wrong—that I have behaved very foolishly; and I will not shrink from confessing the cause of my weakness. I was extremely angry with Mr. Stafford the other night, because he made no exertion to save me; and when I saw him to-day, I could not help showing him that I had not forgiven him."

Mrs. Mordaunt had apprehended her daughter was going to impart to her that she had

that it would be judicious to di
ject of Mr. Stafford's offence as s
sible; so she merely observed,

"You certainly have been a l
able in feeling angry with this p
very silly in wishing to display to
were so. But let the past be for
have only to receive him with a
tenance to-morrow, and all unple
tions *de part et d'autre* will
Stafford has a high and a sensit
may be easily worked upon by l
as readily exasperated by scorn o
I am sure that your own good sen
out to you the imprudence of
irritating the person you have s
the companion of your future
heartlessness of quarrelling abou
the betrothed husband whose hap
hereafter become your first duty
to promote."

daunt saw that she did so with a firm intention of keeping her word, she was perfectly satisfied, and treated her afterwards with even more than usually encouraging affection.

It was so very late the next day before the expected visitor made his appearance, that both mother and daughter began to suspect he was still too deeply affronted to think of coming at all. When he did at length arrive, he looked dreadfully pale and ill, and complained of a very bad headache.

Augusta was sorry to see him in pain; and, to make amends for her former unkindness, she exerted herself to endeavour to cheer him: but she did not succeed. He expressed indeed, more than once, how much gratified he was by her goodness; yet he was evidently out of humour, and his manner was wild and absent. He had been with her but a very short time, when he started up abruptly, and declaring that "his headache was so insufferably troublesome that it unfitted him for any society but his own," he rushed hastily out of the room.

Mrs. Mordaunt did not witness this extraordinary exit. Augusta felt almost alarmed; she knew not what to think of such strange conduct; and she was deeply occupied with re-

Miss Mordaunt started up,
colour rushed into her face
" May I come in ?" demande
" Since you have admitted Car
quite jealous if you refuse to
me. I found your porter in a
trable mood yesterday, but this
more relenting; and as he said
ford had left you about half-a
fancied that my company cou
either hurtful or intrusive."
" On the contrary, I am deli
you, my dear Lady Mary. I ha
anxious, too, to thank you for all
to me during that unlucky scene
afraid I distressed and frightened
After the friends had been ta
while, Lady Mary remarked—
" By the way, I must not forg
that we did Lionel great injustice

go into the country early the following morning."

Mrs. Mordaunt's entrance prevented her daughter's making any reply; but when Lady Mary was gone, she pondered long and bitterly upon the information she had given her about Lord Delmore. Had the fancied insult which had driven her to desperation been only imaginary? Could the supposed discovery of her having authorised Mr. Stafford to consider himself a favoured admirer, have had anything to do with the sudden departure of his former rival? She could not determine either question. But one fact was undoubted—Lord Delmore was gone; and, whether he had absented himself with the intention of avoiding her or not, she felt the imperious necessity of endeavouring to hope that she might never meet him again,—at least, until she had learned to do so with indifference.

CHAPTER II

And ye shall walk in silk at
And siller have to spare,
Gin ye 'll consent to be his
Nor think of Donald ma

The preparations for Augu
proceeded smoothly; a very h
ment was to be made upon her;
presents of every description
down before her with lavish ge
future husband.

As soon as she was declared
receive company, she was ove
constant succession of visits a
tions from all her friends and
and, in short, Miss Mordaunt

being insensible to the pleasure and advantage of obtaining celebrity and wealth; she felt and appreciated the satisfaction of being surrounded by every gratification that vanity and flattery could bestow; and as she never had time to analyze her sentiments, she was upon the whole tolerably well contented with her lot.

Perhaps it would be speaking more correctly to say, that by being kept in a state of continual excitement, she contrived to shut her eyes against all disagreeable reflections.

Mr. Stafford was warmly seconded by Mr. Mordaunt in hurrying on all his arrangements; while Augusta involuntarily endeavoured to find one excuse after another for wishing to postpone the wedding to the remotest possible period. The ceremony was to take place at Mordaunt. Mr. Mordaunt was impatient to get down into the country; and his future son-in-law was to follow him there, as soon as he had concluded the business which for the present detained him in town.

At the commencement of the long vacation, Edward Mordaunt had agreed to make a little tour with one of his college friends; but the moment Augusta's approaching marriage was announced to him, he became so anxious to congratulate her in person upon that event,

Charles had obtained leave to
as he could not bear the idea of
one of the family who would
home upon so joyful an occasion
dently wished that his sister m
friend Lord Delmore; and he
felt much inclined to despise
character. But as soon as he
was decided that the latter was
brother-in-law, he resolved to
prejudices against him, and to
him in future with the kindness
which ought naturally to subsist
near relations.

Captain Mordaunt's regiment h
quartered in Scotland; and as
he should pass within a few mi
in his way to Mordaunt, he fe
tempted to look in upon his fri
had not seen since his accession to
fortune of his ancestors

He was answered in the affirmative, and he immediately ordered a chaise, and desired he might have a postboy who knew the way to D'Arcy.

The landlord looked surprised; it evidently struck him as an unusual occurrence that Lord Delmore should have a visitor, yet he made no remark; and in a few minutes Charles was again *en route*.

A tolerably good cross-road brought him in a short time to the entrance of an extensive and well-wooded park; the venerable oaks stood out majestically in the twilight, and gave an imposing character to a scene which could not boast of much other picturesque beauty. The house was a very handsome pile of building; but there was an air of gloom and desolation about it, which arose, perhaps, from its having been of late years only partially inhabited.

The postboy's loud ring at the door brought out a grey-headed servant, who seemed much astonished at receiving such a summons at that hour in the evening.

"Lord Delmore is down here at present, I understand," said Captain Mordaunt, leaning forward to address him.

"Yes, sir. — My lord is not now in the

house; he has dined, and is gone out walking in the grounds, I believe."

"Very well," replied Charles, coolly; "I will wait for him then till he returns."

The man, however, appeared doubtful if he ought to admit him.

"May I venture to ask," he inquired, in a hesitating voice, "what name I am to give to my lord?"

While Charles was beginning to apprehend that he should find some difficulty in effecting his entrance, he caught a glimpse of Lord Delmore's own servant, who had lived with him when he was in the army, and with whom he was consequently well acquainted.

The moment Fletcher recognized him, he ran forward, and exclaimed in a joyful tone—

"Can it really be you, Captain Mordaunt? I am very happy to see you, sir." Then turning to the old man, he added: "Morrice, this is my lord's great friend Captain Mordaunt." And, as he spoke, he hastened to open the door of the chaise with his own hands.

Charles returned Fletcher's greeting very warmly.

"Lord Delmore is alone, I suppose?" he observed.

"He is, sir. I will go and try if I can find

him, to tell him the good news that you are here. I am extremely glad you are come, for my lord has been very low-spirited lately."

He disappeared accordingly; and old Morrice, after making Captain Mordaunt many apologies for having given him a cold reception, and expressing his regret at not having known who he was, led the way to the library, which Lionel now made his constant sitting-room.

The darkness prevented his guest from distinguishing that the furniture looked rather the worse for wear, and that the books appeared as if they had remained long undisturbed upon their shelves. A few modern publications and some newspapers lay scattered upon a table; and an arm-chair had been drawn near it, in which the master of the mansion had probably been reclining before he went out. The shutters were still unclosed, and Captain Mordaunt walked up to an open window; but he had not stood there long, when Lord Delmore rushed into the room.

It would be impossible to imagine anything more cordial or affectionate than the welcome he gave to his friend.

"I must look at you once again," he said at length, "that I may be quite assured it is yourself. I had nearly despaired of ever en-

joying the happiness of seeing *you*, my best and dearest friend, under this roof."

"We have not, indeed, met for a dreadfully long time," replied Captain Mordaunt; "but I am sure you know, Lionel, that it has been want of power, not of inclination, which has prevented my visiting you sooner. I have now an additional cause, too, for desiring to see you, since you have acquired a claim upon my gratitude which I am most anxious personally to acknowledge, yet can never be able to repay:—you have saved the life of my sister!"

Lord Delmore turned away his head.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed in an agitated voice; "I must not, and will not, hear *you* talk of gratitude to *me*. To rescue a sister of yours from danger, I would willingly have perilled my existence, had it been necessary. But pray do not mention this subject again; for too much has been already said about what was in fact merely an act of common humanity."

"Well," continued Charles with a smile, "I will not attempt to repeat my thanks, since it displeases you to hear them. Yet, though you may forbid me to *express* my obligation to you, you have not the power (tyrant as you are) to prevent my *feeling* it very deeply."

Then, after a pause, he added, in a more

playful tone, "Shall I confess to you, Lionel, that I arrived here with no little curiosity to see your *ménage*, and to discover how you passed your time? Your friendship I well knew was proof against all changes, but I had rather begun to apprehend that your solitary habits had not improved your manners; and, as you never condescended to take any notice of a letter I wrote you just after I heard of the occurrence I dare scarcely allude to, I had some doubts, when I came to storm you in your castle this evening, as to the probability of finding you disposed to admit me within your walls."

Lord Delmore endeavoured to catch the tone of his companion; but it was with ill assumed gaiety that he answered,

"I will not pretend to deny that I am grown very bearish of late; but though I plead guilty to the general charge, I can prove to you that I was less to blame than you imagine for the particular instance of incivility you accuse me of. Your letter, indeed, well deserved an answer; but at the moment I received it, I happened to be unable to hold a pen."

"Have you really been so ill?" inquired Charles very anxiously.

"No, I was not ill; I had only hurt my

right hand. But I ought to congratulate you, Mordaunt: report says that your beautiful sister is going to be married."

"And, for once, report speaks truth. I am now on my road to Mordaunt, to wish her joy, and to pay pretty compliments to my future brother-in-law."

"Is the wedding to take place very soon?" asked Lord Delmore in a suffocated voice.

"I do not know when the settlements will be completed: it depends, I believe, upon them. A marriage is said to be a melancholy ceremony; and though there is nothing that need render Augusta's peculiarly lachrymonious, I cannot help looking forward to it with a sort of dread."

"It must be an awful moment, certainly," remarked Lord Delmore almost unconsciously. And it was with some bitterness that he added, "But Miss Mordaunt will be very happy, no doubt,—as happy as she deserves to be. Stafford was always a most fortunate man. He has long been spoilt and admired by all fair ladies and fine ladies; and, to crown his triumph, he has now attained the object of his fondest wishes. He is very much to be envied."

Captain Mordaunt looked at his friend with considerable surprise.

"Lionel," remarked he at length, "you and I have hitherto had few secrets from each other; and I will candidly tell you, that although I hope Mr. Stafford will make Augusta a good husband, there is another person in the world whom I should have liked much better to receive in that character."

Lord Delmore started violently, but remained silent; and Charles continued:

"You must not be offended at my having expressed a wish——"

"Which is far too flattering to *me*," exclaimed Lionel, hastily interrupting him. "It may cost me an effort, but I will speak out as frankly as you have done. Charles, I did once admire your sister,—perhaps much more than I shall ever again admire any woman upon earth. Yet you know what a wayward being I am. Charming as she is, I found that, even if she would have consented to become mine, an union with her would have been very unlikely to promote the happiness of either of us. You look incredulous; but I am well aware of my own weakness, and, strange as it may sound to you, I repeat, that, as the husband of Augusta Mordaunt, I am convinced I should have been miserable."

Charles did not attempt to say a word more.

could be no use in endeavouring t
any explanation. At all events, it
to set things right; and if his frie
under an error, it could only ag
mortification to clear it up. The
turned upon indifferent subjects;
Lionel exerted himself to appear gay
able, it was clear that his spirits
much depressed.

"I keep up no establishment here
as you may perceive," said he, in a
remark of Captain Mordaunt's. "F
old Morrice are my only attendan
have never yet inhabited more than
Some day or other it will be incum
me to think of setting my house in
the task will be so laborious a one,
determined to put it off as long a
In the mean time, I shall probably s
months of this year

formerly to rail at the miseries of poverty? I had not then experienced the cares and discomforts that attend upon riches. I can truly affirm, that my accession of fortune has brought me neither happiness nor contentment. I have been so continually worried with business, that I have been very often tempted to wish my acres were sunk beneath the sea, and that I was a simple officer in the army again."

Charles was much grieved to discover the desponding tone of his friend's mind, from the melancholy way in which he spoke of his feelings and prospects. He strove to cheer him by every means he could devise, and he flattered himself that his efforts were not quite unsuccessful; but when he endeavoured to lead him to take an interest in his place, and in all that surrounded him, he had the mortification of finding his attempts prove much more unavailing. He had intended to stay only two nights at D'Arcy; but his host was so unwilling to part with him, and his society evidently did him so much good, that he remained there a fortnight.

During their conversations together, Lord Delmore frequently mentioned his cousins the Lady Mortimers. "Caroline," he observed upon one occasion, "is, I suspect, no favourite

of yours. You know what my opinion of her was in former days; and I have not, upon the whole, seen any cause to change it. Yet, in spite of all her faults, I believe she possesses some redeeming good qualities which I did not once give her credit for. I have found, for instance, that she is capable of feeling a sincere interest in the concerns of those she really esteems, and that she can prove a very kind and considerate friend."

"If Lady Caroline," replied Captain Mordaunt with a smile, "has persuaded you that she is sincerely attached to *you*, I am very ready to admit that she has not deceived you; and I am equally willing to allow that you may have found her a most agreeable and insinuating friend. But, to the world in general, I am inclined to imagine that her friendship is too often treacherous and fatal."

"I see," said Lionel, "that your prejudices are likely to prove stronger than my arguments, so I shall leave my fair cousin to your mercy; and if I decline becoming the champion of her merits, I do so with a comfortable assurance that she is very well able to maintain her own cause. Had your attack been directed against her sister Agnes, the case would have been very different,—as different, in short, as

their characters. You will make acquaintance with Agnes while you are at Mordaunt:—you will not be struck by her beauty; and you will, perhaps, at first think her too shy and reserved: but when you know her well, I will venture to predict that you will like her."

Indeed, Lionel spoke so often and so warmly in praise of Lady Agnes, that, in spite of Captain Mordaunt's conviction that he was then suffering acutely from an unfortunate attachment to Augusta, he could not help fancying that at some future period it might not be quite impossible the cousins would feel inclined to console each other under their mutual disappointments, and that Lady Agnes Mortimer might still become Lady Delmore.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt had been established in the country rather more than a week before Edward joined them. During that period they had seen no strangers; and as they had had a good deal of business to attend to, Augusta had spent much of the days alone. The sudden transition to perfect quiet and solitude, from the bustle and activity with which she had lately been surrounded, had produced its natural effect upon her mind. Her spirits sunk when the excitement which had hitherto supported them was gone. The flattering

splendour, faded in importanc
their charms, when she medita
them in her retirement. No a
ruptions occurred to disturb the
thoughts. The hour of self-r
arrived; and she shrunk with i
hension and dismay, as a still s
quired ominously "what chance
she imagined that person had a ri
who, for the sake of securing a
advantageous situation in societ
contemptible enough to agree t
admirer, while she knew herself to
yet decided preference for another

She endeavoured carefully to
wretchedness from her mother; ye
she suffered preyed so visibly upo
that Mrs. Mordaunt began to
about her health.

The morning before Edward
home. Lady C

ting by herself; "but I was so impatient to have a gossip with you, my dear, that I insisted upon mounting my steed, and cantering over here to-day. I wanted, too, to see how you bear your separation from your disconsolate turtle-dove, and to deliver a thousand pretty messages he gave me for you the evening before I left town. You have no idea how forlorn and deserted an object *le pauvre bien-aimé* appeared after your departure: it quite made my heart bleed to look at him!"

"Pray do not talk such nonsense," replied Augusta, colouring with anything but satisfaction.

"I cry you mercy, *ma belle;* I really did not intend to say one disrespectful word—to insinuate one disrespectful idea of your future lord and master. But, if I must speak seriously, in sober sadness I conjure you to tell me what you have been doing with yourself. You are looking wretchedly pale and ill."

"I have not felt quite well for some days," answered Miss Mordaunt: "I believe the air of this place has not agreed with me."

"That of Blossomdale will suit you much better, I have no doubt; and the presence of the owner of Blossomdale may also prove beneficial to you. Solitude is far from salutary

"No, they are not come y
Edward to-morrow; and perh
be here almost as soon."

"Captain Mordaunt is with
suppose? I forget where it i
present."

"It is in Scotland. But I
already set out upon his journey
and is now stopping to make a
road."

There might be something
manner as she pronounced thes
which struck Lady Caroline as
she fixed her eyes upon her with e
as she inquired,

"What friend can your bro
have found to way-lay him in t
regions?"

"He is staying for a few da
Delmore at D'Arcy," answered

not know, or, more properly speaking, I did not recollect, that his lordship had gone down to D'Arcy."

Then, after a moment's consideration, she added: "I feel very much tempted to tell you a little history about that same unlucky cousin of mine; but as it relates principally to yourself, and is not moreover very creditable to him, perhaps I had better not do so."

"I have not any wish to hear it," said Augusta in a faint voice, and blushing very deeply.

Her companion looked surprised and disappointed. "You certainly," observed she, "may claim the merit of being the most discreet of all the daughters of Eve. I cannot determine what I ought to do! A very extraordinary secret has come accidentally to my knowledge. Since we last met, I have learned a circumstance which might once have materially affected your peace of mind, and which has actually exercised the most powerful influence over your destiny. As it gives a very clear insight into the character of a person you were perchance formerly inclined to like better than he deserved, I am not sure that it will be quite right— that I shall altogether be justified in concealing it from you."

"Lady Caroline," cried Augusta, in an earnest, tremulous tone, "if you are aware of anything I ought to know, let me hear it without delay, however painful it may be. But do not, I beseech you, torture me with dark and fearful insinuations which I am perfectly unable to comprehend."

Her ladyship seemed much touched by this appeal. "I will tell you all, my poor Augusta," she said; "though I warn you that your feelings will be much shocked during the recital; and though it will be extremely unpleasant to mine, to expose such baseness of conduct in a near relation, who, with all his faults, is still dear to me; as you are yet too young and too innocent in the evil ways of this wicked world to have formed any idea of. But, before I impart to you my discovery, you must give me a solemn promise never to repeat a single word of what I am going to communicate to you, to any living creature. It is only upon that condition, that I can consent to confide to you my secret. Do you feel confident that you can keep it faithfully? that no persuasion, no threat, no temptation, will have power to extort it from you?"

"I do not fear my own firmness in that respect," replied Augusta mournfully; "since

I know that I *can* keep a secret; but I confess that there seems to me something very alarming in the one that requires to be broken to me with so much precautionary preparation."

"If you feel afraid to hear it, my dear," observed Lady Caroline rather contemptuously, "it is not yet too late to say so. You have merely to speak the word, and I will never allude to this subject again."

"No, no," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt; "I have now gone too far to recede." And with impressive seriousness she immediately gave the promise which her wily companion had so imperatively required of her.

Lady Caroline drew her chair still closer to Augusta's. "You may perhaps never have heard," she said, "that in very early life Lionel had a fatal passion for play. He indulged it pretty freely, until at length he would have been obliged to sell his commission and to leave his country, if the kind counsel and exertions of Captain Mordaunt, and the still kinder pecuniary assistance of his brother, had not enabled him to extricate himself from his difficulty. I believe that before Delmore paid his debts, he exacted that Lionel should pledge his word of honour never to touch a card or to

make a bet again. There is no doubt that for a long while he adhered faithfully to the very letter of his engagement: but the love of play is an incurable evil; it may be subdued and kept under restraint for a time, yet when once it has been allowed to obtain a hold upon any one, it is hopeless to expect that it can ever be entirely eradicated."

Augusta shuddered. She recollected the dismay Lord Delmore had betrayed when she unconsciously asked him at the Doncaster races to instruct her in the art of betting: she recalled, too, how often he had alluded, during his visit at Mr. Wingfield's, to certain important obligations conferred upon him by her brother; and she felt convinced it was no false accusation that Lady Caroline had brought against him.

The latter thus continued the thread of her explanation:—

"When Lionel came up to town early last spring, he found very little going forward; and he unluckily happened to fall in with some of his former gambling companions. I will do him the justice to add, that at first he tried to avoid their society; but he was at length tempted to look in with them at Crockford's and other places of that description. He went

there perhaps with the intention of being merely a spectator; but of course he was soon induced to take a part in what was going forward. He began by risking a very small stake, and went on for some weeks without having any remarkable run of good or bad luck; but he was destined before very long to pay the penalty of his unprincipled imprudence. One ill-fated night, (if I mistake not, it was the very night after you first met him at dinner at my father's in Grosvenor-square,) he was rash enough to hazard a very considerable sum. There were not many people present, and Mr. Stafford was his antagonist.—You need not look so much alarmed, my dear Augusta: everybody plays sometimes—there is no harm in an occasional extravagance of that kind; and I assure you, your future *caro sposo* has not the character of being by any means an habitual gambler.—Upon the occasion I am describing, he and Lionel appeared, from some unknown reason, to be animated by a greater degree of personal animosity than the chances of the game would naturally have given rise to. Fortune seemed to fluctuate between them; they both grew more desperate every moment,—the cards were flung aside, and they trusted their success to the dice alone. Lionel completely

lost his temper; while Mr. Stafford, though greatly excited, maintained the advantage of a clearer head.

"The pleasure of winning a final triumph was perhaps more an object of ambition to the combatants than the desire of pecuniary gain. At length the scale seemed inclined to turn decidedly in Mr. Stafford's favour. Lionel became frantic, and at every new reverse he insisted upon increasing the stake. His adversary began to consider that they were not proceeding upon fair terms, and observed 'that he thought they had played long enough.' But his infatuated companion would not listen to this proposal, and continued plunging deeper and deeper towards his ruin, until Mr. Stafford rose from the table, declaring positively 'that he would then win no more;' but adding, 'that he should be very ready to give Lionel his revenge whenever he chose to demand it, or even to risk over again upon one last chance all that had been lost that night.'

"'Agreed!' cried Lionel wildly. 'Your last proposition is a fair and handsome one, and I willingly accept it. Let us, as you say, try our luck once again; and, on my part, let the loss double my present debt to you, while

the gain shall leave us upon an equal footing —as we set out.'

"The experiment was accordingly made, and Lionel found himself still destined to be unfortunate!

"I will not shock you by describing his despair. His debt to Mr. Stafford was of such appaling magnitude, that it could not be settled without either selling D'Arcy, or laying so heavy a burthen upon his estate as would disable him from ever inhabiting his own house. And nothing perhaps galled him more keenly in the agony of his distress, than the certainty of forfeiting Captain Mordaunt's good opinion; for your brother was aware of the sacred promise he had formerly given Delmore.

"I need not tell you, that Lionel was too proud to allow others to witness his anguish; he rushed away from his companions, and hurried home to give vent to it alone. Mr. Stafford pitied him; his conscience whispered that he ought not to have allowed him to play on, when he perceived he was scarcely in a state to be conscious of what he was doing; he was too rich himself to regard any acquisition of wealth as a consideration of primary importance; but there was one object in which

he had centred the happiness of his future life, and in the attainment of this he fancied that Lionel possessed the power of thwarting him. He therefore came to the strange determination of offering him a compromise.

"He called upon him early the following morning, and told him that he was ready to give up all claim to a debt, the payment of which might be inconvenient to him, upon condition that Lionel, in return, would engage never to attempt to cross him in another pursuit, by endeavouring to rival him in the affections of Miss Mordaunt.

"This proposal was in the first instance rejected with indignation; but Mr. Stafford pressed Lionel to take a few hours to consider it. The consequence was, that he made up his mind to agree to the compact which had been suggested to him; and it was accordingly ratified in due form by both the parties concerned."

Augusta had listened with forced composure to the former part of her companion's recital; but she was so shocked by the baseness of this last transaction, that she was no longer able to command her feelings; and she burst into a violent flood of tears. Lady Caroline allowed her to weep in uninterrupted silence; but as soon as she perceived that the poignancy of her

emotion began to subside, she took her hand, and said to her, in a voice of unusual kindness and sympathy—

"I can never tell you, my poor Augusta, how much it grieves me to have thus distressed you."

"Oh, do not say a word more about that," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt. "I am very much obliged to you for having exposed to me the despicable character of the person I at one time foolishly believed to be more amiable and meritorious than most others; and I am truly grateful to you for having revealed to me the scarcely less contemptible conduct of the man who thinks himself secure of obtaining my hand, while he is aware that he cannot succeed in winning my heart. Mr. Stafford may, however, find himself disappointed after all. He may yet learn that Augusta Mordaunt is not so poor-spirited as to submit to the indiguity of having her affections transferred, as an article of barter, from one unprincipled gambler to another, — to have them purchased with money basely and dishonourably gained—in short, with the wages of iniquity!"

Lady Caroline had not expected this burst of indignation, and she almost repented having communicated to Augusta the secret which had

wounded feelings and to mo
ment.

"I have no wish," she re
tempt to justify Mr. Stafford'
it strikes me as having been
and very unlike anything I ev
before. But I own I think you a
rather more seriously angry wit
quite deserves. If we examine
tially, we shall find that he has
friend either to you or to Lione
from inflicting an injury upon yo
vented you from receiving the da
tions of a person he knew to be
your affections; and, painful a
may appear which he imposed u
was only anticipating what he mu
have submitted to a little later;
nution in his fortune would ha
impossible for him to marry f
Stafford i

vantages he possessed over his rival, there certainly was much generosity in giving him a plausible excuse to receive back the wealth he might have deprived him of. Lionel retains all the comforts of affluence, all the appendages that are suitable to his rank and place in society; and it is to Mr. Stafford that he is indebted for them."

"It may be so," replied Augusta, scornfully. "*I* envy not the luxuries that are thus bestowed; but perhaps he who can condescend to accept them may also be able to appreciate the kindness and consideration of the motives with which they were conferred. Lord Delmore may stoop to be Mr. Stafford's pensioner; but all the gold of Peru, all the jewels of the East, would not now induce *me* ever to become Mr. Stafford's wife!"

"You will think differently a few hours hence," observed Lady Caroline, "when you have had time to reflect upon Mr. Stafford's redeeming merits, and coolly to weigh the circumstances of the case."

At this moment Mrs. Mordaunt passed the windows; and as her ladyship caught a glimpse of her figure, she hastily added,

"And, in the mean while, remember your

promise, and beware that you do not betray my secret by any rash or unguarded word or action."

"You may depend upon my discretion," said Augusta, firmly; but her heart sickened as she spoke, for this cautionary hint had opened her eyes to the utter hopelessness of her fate. She bitterly regretted, too, the knowledge she had acquired; since she found it could only render her more unhappy than she had been before, without affording her the power of communicating her misery to those who might still be both able and willing to relieve it.

Lady Caroline Mortimer was mistaken in supposing that reflection would remove Augusta's contempt and displeasure against her affianced husband. On the contrary, the more she thought of all the consequences that had resulted from the story she had just heard, the more aggravated did those feelings towards him become.

It is true that she despised Lord Delmore still more deeply; yet she could not help lamenting that the many amiable qualities he possessed should be entirely perverted by one fatal weakness, and that a character evidently intended for better things should have fallen so low. She believed he was unhappy. It

seemed natural that he should writhe beneath the sense of his own humiliation; and her vanity suggested that he might experience another cause of mortification and regret. The reason of that extraordinary behaviour towards herself, which she had hitherto been totally unable to comprehend, was now very clearly explained. She was no longer at a loss to discover the motive which induced him to decline joining the party to Richmond, to understand his conduct during the scene at the Opera, or to account for his sudden departure from town. In short, the persuasion she arrived at, that, with all his faults, he was still as much attached to her as ever, mingled a strange sentiment of compassion with the anger she justly entertained against him.

She passed a sleepless night; and when Edward Mordaunt reached home the following day, he was both shocked and startled by her haggard appearance and her painfully nervous manner.

As soon as he and Augusta were alone together, he said to her very affectionately, while he gazed with mournful anxiety in her face,—

"My mother talks of your having been very ill, my dearest Augusta; but I have been too long accustomed to understand every turn of your countenance to be easily deceived, and I

much fear—I suspect—that you are unhappy. If my conjecture is a true one, you will not, I am sure, refuse to confide your sorrows to me. It is not impossible I may be able to remove them; and, at all events, they will be alleviated by my sharing them with you."

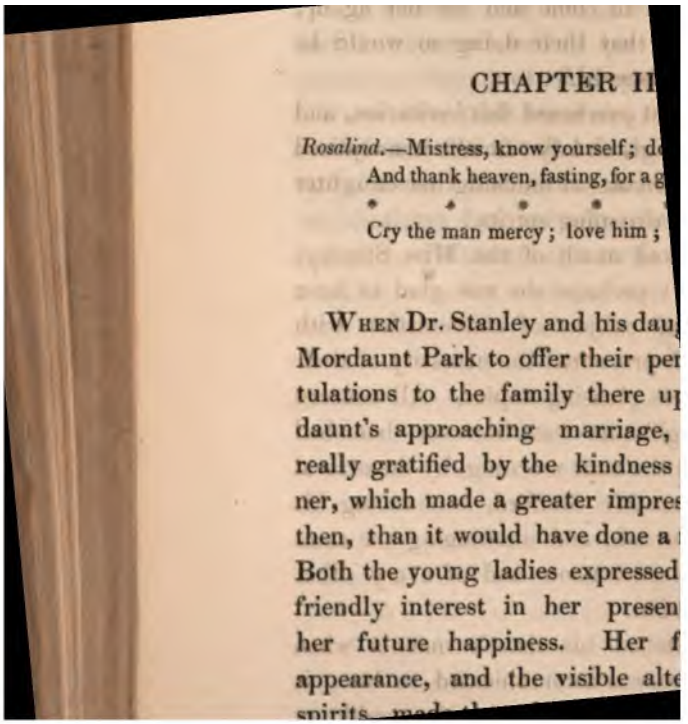
This was a severe trial to poor Augusta. She had already felt what a comfort it would have been to her to impart her distresses to her brother, and she had ardently longed to have the power of doing so; but the fear of proving unfaithful to her promise, now restrained her from confessing her misery. She endeavoured to give an ambiguous answer to his kind interrogations, and to persuade him that she was suffering from the effects of ill health alone.

Edward was much hurt by her reserve.

"I will not torment you with any more questions," he remarked in a tone of mortification, "since I see that you are determined not to trust me with your secrets. There used not to be this sort of concealment between us formerly. Perhaps you have some good reason for being mysterious now; but should you at any future moment require assistance or advice, I trust you will apply to *me;* as you know that it will always afford me the most heartfelt satisfaction to give you either, or both, to the best of my ability."

Augusta was for some minutes too much affected to be able to speak; at length she replied in an agitated voice,

"Dearest Edward, you have through all my life been indeed my kindest, warmest friend. It almost breaks my heart to appear ungracious to you now; but you must bear with me, and forgive me. And, oh! do not refuse to believe me, when I tell you truly, that I never before felt half so much affection and gratitude towards you as I do at this instant!"



CHAPTER II

Rosalind.—Mistress, know yourself; d
And thank heaven, fasting, for a g
* * * *
Cry the man mercy; love him;

When Dr. Stanley and his dau
Mordaunt Park to offer their per
tulations to the family there u
daunt's approaching marriage,
really gratified by the kindness
ner, which made a greater impre
then, than it would have done a
Both the young ladies expressed
friendly interest in her presen
her future happiness. Her f
appearance, and the visible alte
spirits

At parting, Augusta told them "she believed she was not strong enough to walk so far as to the Rectory, but that she hoped they would have the charity to come and see her again; though she felt that their doing so would be more than she deserved."

Mrs. Mordaunt overheard this invitation, and seconded it very graciously; for she was rejoiced to discover any means of amusing her daughter and raising her drooping spirits.

Augusta talked much of the Miss Stanleys in the evening; perhaps she was glad to have found a neutral subject of conversation with Edward, which prevented the necessity of their recurring to less pleasing topics. All concern about her neighbours was, however, banished from her mind the next morning, by the arrival of a letter from Mr. Stafford, announcing his immediate approach, and mentioning the completion of the settlements and of every other bridal preparation.

Edward watched his sister's manner when this intelligence was communicated to her; it betrayed extreme agitation, but he could not trace anything like pleasure in the varying expression of her countenance; and as he fancied that a deeper shade of melancholy had come over her afterwards, he was irresistibly tempted

to impart to his mother his fears that Augusta's depression arose from some secret reluctance to fulfil her matrimonial engagement.

"I do not see how that can be the case," said Mrs. Mordaunt, who was more startled and disquieted by his suggestion than she chose to admit: "your sister's acceptance of Mr. Stafford was a voluntary act, and she has never, either directly or indirectly, expressed to me the slightest objection to the idea of her intended marriage. Mr. Stafford will probably be with us to-day; and when he arrives we shall very soon discover if there is any real ground for your suspicions: I hope and trust we shall find that they are visionary."

Mr. Stafford came; and the reception Augusta gave him, reminded him very disagreeably of the first visit he had paid her in London as her accepted admirer.

In addition to all his former presents, he had brought her a magnificent suit of jewels; but while Mrs. Mordaunt was rapturous in the admiration she expressed when he displayed this beautiful *cadeau*, her daughter looked at the gems with apparent indifference, and scarcely condescended to thank him for them.

Mr. Stafford felt much piqued; and when

the family party assembled at dinner-time, he was evidently in bad humour.

"We now want only one more person to render our circle complete," observed Mrs. Mordaunt, addressing him with a gracious smile. "I hope Charles will be here in a day or two. He is, I assure you, very anxious to meet you."

"Mr. Wingfield told me," replied Mr. Stafford rather drily, "that he had heard your son was staying at D'Arcy. Was that information correct?"

"Yes: his old military ally, Lord Delmore, had pressed him so repeatedly to visit him, that he found it impossible to pass his gate without stopping to see him."

"D'Arcy must be a tolerably dull *séjour*, I imagine," continued Mr. Stafford, in a sneering tone. "I believe the place is old-fashioned, gloomy, and dilapidated; yet Delmore himself seems to feel a strong partiality for it,—at least, he contrives to spend many months of the year there, with very little society to enliven him except that of the bats and owls."

Augusta's eyes flashed fire. "I never was at D'Arcy myself," she said; "but I have always heard the house described as a very

handsome building. It may be rather out of repair at present; yet perhaps the possessor, to whom it has descended from a long line of noble ancestors, may not feel inclined to find fault with it because it bears the stamp of antiquity. Had it been a place of his own purchasing, the case might have been very different: he would then probably have required his new mansion to be adorned with every modern luxury and improvement."

Mr. Stafford felt the personal taunt conveyed in this last observation very keenly; his brow contracted; yet he commanded his resentment, and spoke not a word in reply.

Mr. Mordaunt cast a very angry glance towards his daughter, and remarked in a sarcastic voice—

"Augusta seems to be quite eloquent today. I had not the advantage of catching very distinctly the sense of what she might be saying; but that fine tirade sounded to me to be almost worthy of Miss Carewell,—at least, something very much in her style."

"*I* was unfortunate enough," answered Mr. Stafford bitterly, "to hear too well all that was spoken by Miss Mordaunt;"—and turning to Augusta, he added in a lower tone—"and likewise perfectly to understand it."

Augusta felt neither power nor courage to open her lips again; she looked abashed, terrified, and miserable. Mr. Stafford also remained indignantly silent; and not all Mrs. Mordaunt's strenuous exertions to restore harmony and good-humour, or her husband's and Edward's endeavours to promote conciliation and keep up appearances, could succeed in bringing about anything like conversation during the rest of dinner.

As soon as the ladies left the room, Mr. Stafford rose. "You must forgive me, Mr. Mordaunt," he exclaimed, "if I am no longer able to bear such treatment as I have just met with from your daughter. When Miss Mordaunt condescended to promise me her hand, she led me to hope that my sincere and devoted attachment for her was not unreturned. Under this flattering delusion, she has since allowed me to make every preparation for an alliance which I trusted would have secured our mutual happiness. Yet, when I came as her affianced husband, to request her to name the day when she would permit me to lead her to the altar, she received me with the most appaling coldness and disdain: she hardly looked at the jewels I offered for her acceptance; and her whole manner and conversation have sufficiently

proved to me that I am become an object of her aversion and contempt. I feel that I have been most cruelly ill-used. It was barbarous to permit me to encourage hopes which were thus to terminate in mortification and disappointment. It was unfair to lead me on to expose myself, and furnish a subject of ridicule to all my acquaintance!—and it was unkind to suffer me to come down here to undergo a personal humiliation, when it would have been easy for Miss Mordaunt to have signified to me by a letter the very unflattering change that had taken place in her sentiments towards me. I am willing to suppose that neither you nor Mrs. Mordaunt can have sanctioned such conduct in your daughter: indeed, I plainly perceive that it has both astonished and displeased you. You will therefore understand, that it is no feeling of disrespect or animosity to you which renders it impossible for me, in my present circumstances, to remain even for one night under your roof. I must beg you to have the goodness to inform Miss Mordaunt from me, that I consider our engagement completely cancelled; and that she need be under no apprehension of my annoying her in future with my presence here, or offending her by my attentions when we happen to meet in society."

Mr. Mordaunt was thunderstruck. He had perceived that Mr. Stafford had been deeply offended by Augusta's scornful behaviour; but he had never anticipated the possibility of his deciding thus suddenly upon so extreme a measure. Indeed, it appeared to him that the impertinence he had witnessed (though excessively provoking and inexcusable) had scarcely afforded him sufficient provocation for carrying his resentment to such a desperate length. He suspected that Augusta had at no time treated her admirer very graciously; and he had not imagined that any new demonstration of indifference or even of dislike upon her part would have driven him to think of breaking off his marriage.

Mr. Mordaunt had considered his daughter already splendidly provided for; and he had little inclination to retain her society at home, or to have the trouble of carrying her again to London as an unmarried young lady. He therefore attempted to appease Mr. Stafford's indignation, and to persuade him that the peevish irritation in Augusta's manner had proceeded entirely from bodily disease, and was one of the very unpleasant results of the accident she had met with.

"I trust," he concluded, "that, now this is

explained to you, you will see her conduct in a different light. I shall tell her what you have hitherto thought of it; and I am convinced that she will be much grieved to find that she has hurt your feelings so severely."

"No," replied Mr. Stafford; "if Miss Mordaunt believed she had broken my heart, I cannot suppose that the circumstance would give her the slightest pain. I am at length convinced that she has disliked me from the first moment I ever saw her. I suspected this very soon after she had consented to listen to my suit; Mrs. Mordaunt's arguments then persuaded me to attribute to illness that rooted aversion for me which her daughter was unable to conceal. But I cannot be thus deluded a second time; nor would any consideration now induce me to receive as my wife a young lady who I am aware despises my alliance, and can scarcely endure my society."

The tone and manner in which these last words were pronounced, showed Mr. Mordaunt that it would be hopeless to pursue a mode of attack which he had meditated attempting as a final resource. Having found that persuasive measures could make no impression upon his guest, he had intended to take up a higher position,—to talk of the impossibility of seeing his

daughter slighted, and to hint that Augusta's family might be inclined to compel him to fulfil his engagement. But he now perceived that, in Mr. Stafford's present mood, this sort of language would only render him more desperate; and that to try to argue with him, until the violence of his irritation had had time to subside, would be as vain as to endeavour to reason with a madman. He succeeded, however, in prevailing upon him to remain at Mordaunt that night, by representing to him what an extraordinary appearance his instantaneous departure would have in the eye of the world.

When the gentlemen repaired to the drawing-room, they found Mrs. Mordaunt alone. She looked anxious and distressed, and told them "that Augusta had been suffering with so dreadful a headache, that she had advised her to go and lie down for an hour or two;" but she added, "that she hoped the pain would abate, and allow her to appear again in the course of the evening."

During this communication Mr. Stafford's countenance darkened, and assumed that vindictive expression which was peculiar to it in anger. His hostess shrunk from his gaze, as he remarked, in a calm, sarcastic voice, "that he was grieved to find Miss Mordaunt had been

so much afflicted with the headache lately: that he trusted she would very soon be better, and that, when the cause of her indisposition was removed, the relief she would experience would prove permanent."

Mrs. Mordaunt saw that these words implied more than she could understand, and she looked towards her husband for an explanation: he took her aside, and described to her in a few minutes all that had transpired since she left the dining-room.

She heard his narration in silence, and then informed him, in her turn, that she had in the mean while had a sort of *éclaircissement* with Augusta; who, without venturing to request that she might be permitted to break off her marriage, had confessed that she had never liked Mr. Stafford, and that, as their union drew nearer, her reluctance to enter into it was increased instead of diminished.

"I do not pretend to excuse her," concluded Mrs. Mordaunt; "she has behaved extremely ill; and I am altogether more grieved and mortified than I have power to express. But since she cannot overcome this unfortunate aversion for her intended husband, it would be barbarous to compel her to marry him. I was most anxious to consult with you upon what

was to be done under these perplexing circumstances; for I little suspected that our guest would have anticipated Augusta's wishes, and thus relieved us from all embarrassment upon the subject."

"I own," replied Mr. Mordaunt, "that I cannot agree with you in feeling rejoiced to get rid of Mr. Stafford; and even now, if I could succeed in retaining him as my future son-in-law, I should be truly glad to do so. This is no moment for arguing the matter with you at length; you are perfectly acquainted with my sentiments, and I shall feel greatly obliged to you if you will use all your eloquence to soothe the indignant lover, while it shall be my task to endeavour to bring the refractory young lady to her senses."

"Let me beseech you, Mr. Mordaunt," said his wife in an imploring tone, "not to speak harshly to Augusta. Poor child! her nerves are still in a very weak state. Had you not better entrust this commission to me?"

"No; I will go to her myself, and explain to her the situation in which she will be placed if she remains unmarried. You need not be afraid of my startling her delicate nerves, or exerting any undue authority to bend her to obedience. It is merely my purpose to state to

to her that I am oppressed
culties; and that, consequent
she must not hope in future
couleur de rose, as she has do
few months."

Then, to prevent the possi
ther remonstrance from Mrs
abruptly left the room, and pr
to his daughter's apartment.

Augusta was sitting near an
and so completely was she abso
thoughts, that she did not hear
the door; nor was she even aw
sence until he spoke to her.

At the sound of his voice sh
her seat, and could scarcely sup
of terror and astonishment at
pected a visitor.

"Sit down, Augusta," said
"and do not look so frighte

of the bitter vexation which her mother and himself were experiencing at her misconduct; told her that it would prove a great disadvantage to her through life to have treated her accepted admirer so unworthily, and that she would have a very slender chance of ever finding another husband: painted in glowing colours the nature of the difficulties under which he was labouring, and showed her how desirable it was for her family as well as for herself that she should form a brilliant alliance: observed, that he feared it would not be in his power to take her out as much as he had done: warned her to recollect that she was fond of gaiety, amusement, and admiration; and to consider how she would like the dull uniformity of a retired life:—finally, he advised her to attempt, if it might not yet be impracticable, to effect a reconciliation with Mr. Stafford. "There was no doubt," he said, "that he had been sincerely attached to her; and as it was her supposed indifference which had wounded him so keenly, it was more than probable that conciliatory kindness on her part would soon restore harmony between them."

Augusta was much impressed by her father's arguments. He had never before talked to her as if he considered her a reasonable creature; and she was gratified by his doing so now.

His language affected to be that of persuasion, but his tone gave it an air of command; and she felt very much like the poor bird who is fascinated by the gaze of the rattlesnake, and has no power to escape from its dreaded toils. She was shocked and startled by the picture Mr. Mordaunt had placed before her. Her conscience told her she deserved all the blame he had imputed to her. She was distressed at the pain she had given her parents, particularly her mother; she was horrified at the idea of being despised by the world, and appalled by the discovery of the state of affairs at home. In short, she saw no means of extricating herself from the labyrinth of difficulties in which she had become involved but by making her peace with Mr. Stafford. The alternative was a fearful one; yet she had little time for reflection, and she resolutely determined to submit to it.

Mr. Mordaunt listened with great satisfaction to her expressions of penitence, and promises of implicit obedience to his wishes. He praised her docility, spoke to her in terms of kindness and encouragement; and having recommended her to repair to her looking-glass and re-arrange her disordered ringlets, he proposed to her to accompany him down stairs.

Augusta mechanically followed all his directions; and as the father and daughter re-entered the drawing-room together, Mrs. Mordaunt turned towards the latter a look of mingled curiosity and compassion, while Edward regarded her with the most affectionate sympathy. Mr. Stafford rose to give up to her the seat upon the sofa by her mother, and inquired, in a very cold, un-lover-like manner, if her headache was better? Augusta thanked him — replied that it was nearly gone — and a long and uncomfortable silence ensued.

Mr. Mordaunt perceived that the best mode of relieving their mutual awkwardness would be to break the family circle.

"The evening is so warm," he said, "that I see no reason why we might not be rural enough to take a few turns in the garden. The air will revive Augusta; and, if I recollect right, she used to be very fond of walking by moonlight last year."

This proposition was readily agreed to. Mrs. Mordaunt's hat had been constructed with the intention of being worn in the house, yet it might afford a sufficient screen from the summer air; and as her cloak was always lying in readiness for her upon the hall-table, she was speedily equipped. Edward went to fetch his

sister's shawl and bonnet; and while she was waiting for them, Mr. Stafford observed, in a tone of distant civility,

"I should offer to attend you in your walk, Miss Mordaunt, if I did not believe that my society would be unwelcome to you."

"You are much mistaken," answered Augusta: "I should, on the contrary, be very glad of your company."

Thus invited, he could not decline walking by her side; but his bearing was cold and constrained, and he made no attempt to give her his arm. Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt and Edward took care to keep at a discreet distance from the discordant pair; and as soon as Augusta supposed them to be out of hearing, she turned toward her companion and said,

"I am extremely sorry to learn from my father that I have given you serious displeasure. I own that you have had reason to consider my behaviour very ungracious; and I can only repeat, that I feel much regret at having been so wayward and disagreeable to you."

"This is more than I expected or required," rejoined Mr. Stafford drily. Then, after a pause, he added, "Did Mr. Mordaunt also inform you that it is my purpose to leave this place early to-morrow morning?"

"He did: but is it quite impossible—is it quite out of your power,—to alter your plans,—and to remain here longer?"

"I fear it is. I have made the mortifying discovery, that although you may be persuaded reluctantly to give me your hand, your heart will still belong to another. And you must not be offended with me, if I plainly declare to you, that upon such terms I cannot—I will not accept it!"

The blood rushed to Augusta's face, and pride, and shame, and anger for an instant choked her utterance. She conquered her feelings, however, and replied with desperate firmness,

"I will confess that I have been unable to return your attachment—that I may have sometimes regretted having entered into a rash engagement; but I protest to you, that no compulsion has ever been resorted to, to induce me to fulfil it; and that it is with my own free will that I am now ready to do so. I will also most solemnly assure you, that if all the admirers I have had in my life were at this instant kneeling at my feet, there would not be any one whom I should wish to select, or whom I would even willingly agree to receive, as my husband."

"Augusta," exclaimed Mr. Stafford in an

altered voice, while he looked at her so intently that he seemed endeavouring to read her very thoughts — "may I believe that you have spoken truly?"

"You may indeed."

"Then, by heavens, I *will* stay! I will forget everything!—But no, no," he continued a moment afterwards in a sadder tone, "I must not allow myself to be thus deceived. I *know* that you love Delmore; and that if *he* were even now to consider himself at liberty to plead to you for your favour, he would not plead in vain."

"Mr. Stafford," said Augusta haughtily, "this is too insulting in every way; — this is more than I can bear! When I condescended to explain to you my feelings, I performed the task I had imposed upon myself honestly and sincerely; and if I were a man, you would not now dare to tell me to my face that you disbelieved my solemn assertion."

Mr. Stafford was much abashed.

"Forgive me, I entreat you!" cried he. "I cannot recall my words; but I give you my honour that you have entirely mistaken their meaning."

Then drawing his hand across his brow, he appeared to be endeavouring to collect his

thoughts, and to work up his mind to some decided resolution.

The struggle seemed to be a severe one, for he remained long silent and irresolute. Now and then a half-muttered exclamation burst from his lips; and at length he betrayed his feelings more distinctly in the following soliloquy:—

"I have been miserable from the hour it became known to me that Delmore was my favoured rival. I was fortunate enough to have put it out of his power to interfere with my prospects, before his shadow fell so inopportunely across my path the very last time that we came in contact with each other. Yet even that triumph avails me little, since he is still able to blight my happiness. I have found him a haughty, though a losing antagonist; he shows me that he despises me, at the very moment when I have most successfully foiled him. The game is now completely in my own hands; and, irresolute fool that I am, I dare not venture to make the final move that would give him checkmate for life."

While Augusta listened to these declarations, her dislike and contempt for Mr. Stafford revived with redoubled force, and she could no longer restrain herself from expressing the

sentiments she had hitherto struggled to keep under control. Indeed, she was so entirely thrown off her guard, that she forgot the strict caution it was necessary for her to observe in order to avoid betraying the secret that had been entrusted to her by Lady Caroline Mortimer.

"You have presumed too far upon my patience," she said scornfully; "but have you never heard that even a worm will turn if you tread upon it? And, confident as you now boast yourself to be of your power over my destiny, you may find that it has not yet been irrevocably placed under your command. I shall not deign to answer the insinuations you have thought proper to throw out upon the subject of Lord Delmore; — they might have been spared: and you will excuse me if I observe, that it was ungenerous to exult over a vanquished enemy, and cruel to attempt to distress me by condemning a person for whom you affect to suppose that I feel a tender partiality. One thing only I must add, in justice to myself. Contemptible as you seem to imagine me, I chance to be informed of some circumstances which you perhaps little suspect can have come to my knowledge; and you may feel assured, that if I do ever make up my mind to be the

wife of a gambler, the husband I select shall neither be impoverished by receiving my hand, or obtain it as a bartered compensation for a debt of *honour*."

Mr. Stafford started violently. He gazed at Augusta as if he deemed it almost impossible she had really uttered the words he had just heard; and then he exclaimed,

"Philip Mortimer has been base enough to tell our secret to his sister, and Lady Caroline has played me false." And as this suspicion gained strength in his imagination, his countenance darkened, his brow contracted, and he clenched his hands with rage.

Miss Mordaunt watched him with terror. She trembled to think of the consequences that might result from her imprudence, and she was shocked at having broken the promise she had given to her friend. With an anxious desire to screen the latter, and an eager hope of being able in some degree to remedy the mischief she had done, she remarked with considerable promptness, "I can easily imagine that Mr. Mortimer may be treacherous; and Lady Caroline is sufficiently fond of a mischievous joke, to have vexed you in a thousand different ways: but I cannot see what concern *she* can have had in the question which has caused our

present unlucky dispute. I always believed her to have been one of your warmest and firmest allies."

"I did certainly suppose that she was my friend," replied Mr. Stafford with a sneer, "because I suspected she had a private interest in being so: I therefore cannot easily give credence to her having attempted to lower me in your opinion.—But you were pleased to hint, Miss Mordaunt," continued he after a pause, "that you had been made acquainted with circumstances relating to me which you believed it would have been my desire to have kept concealed from you. May I request you to tell me what those circumstances were, and by whom they were communicated to you?"

Augusta felt much embarrassed. "As I forbore to mention any person by name," she said, after a moment's consideration, "in the allusion I was foolish enough to make just now, those only can require me to give up my authority, who choose to take the attack home to themselves. If you happened to understand what I referred to, there can be no occasion for my explaining it to you; and if you did not, I must decline throwing any farther light upon the subject, since far too much has been said by both of us already."

"I perfectly agree with you, and will therefore consent not to urge this point: but let me advise you to be more guarded in future, and not again to bring forward charges which you cannot and dare not support. This is probably the last conversation that will ever take place between us in private; and as almost every word we have spoken has only tended to increase our mutual irritation against each other, perhaps the sooner we bring it to a termination the better. To-morrow, long before you make your appearance down-stairs, I shall be upon my road back to London."

"I have no longer any wish to detain you at Mordaunt. When we left the house this evening, I thought it not impossible that an explanation upon my part might have restored our former amity; and I felt that I owed you something of the sort. But what has passed during the last half-hour has, I imagine, completely convinced us both that we could never have lived happily together; and we ought to be very thankful that we have made this discovery before we had become indissolubly united to each other. Adieu, Mr. Stafford! If we part in anger, I hope that all feelings of enmity between us will be speedily forgotten. Our acquaintance has been an unfortunate one:

it would have been far happier for us if we had never met!"

As she concluded these words, she turned away from her companion, and walked back towards the house. He made no attempt to follow her, but stood for some time rooted to the spot where she had left him, and absorbed in bitter and angry meditation.

Augusta did not pause till she reached her own room. When she found herself alone there, she threw herself upon her bed. The spirit which had hitherto supported her gave way, and she burst into a violent flood of tears. Her feelings were too complicated to allow her to understand anything clearly, but she had a general conviction that she was very miserable; and she was oppressed by a painful dread of encountering her father's anger.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt were very disagreeably surprised to perceive Mr. Stafford advancing to join them, unaccompanied by their daughter; and Mr. Mordaunt inquired what had become of Augusta?

"Miss Mordaunt and I have parted," replied Mr. Stafford; "and I much lament that we did not understand each other sooner. From the kindness with which you and Mrs.

Mordaunt have always treated me, I am led to infer that your opinion of me is favourable enough to have made you wish that this affair could have terminated otherwise; and I assure you it is with sincere regret that I now feel myself obliged finally to renounce my proposed alliance with your family."

"I trust you are aware," said Mr. Mordaunt proudly, "that *I* am not a sort of person to desire to bestow a daughter of mine upon anybody who has not persuaded me of his anxiety to receive her. But, at the same time, I must own that, since you formerly expressed yourself devotedly attached to Augusta, and extremely solicitous to obtain from me her hand, I am at a loss to imagine what reason you can have found to induce you thus suddenly to change your mind, and to reject so unceremoniously the promised boon."

"I have already informed you," rejoined Mr. Stafford in a tone of defiance, "that I am perfectly convinced I am despised by Miss Mordaunt. This alone, I should have fancied, might have been a sufficient cause for my declining to compel her to fulfil her engagement. But when I add, that I have also ascertained the certainty of her being still attached to

Lord Delmore, I think you will allow the impossibility of my wishing that she should become Mrs. Stafford."

Then advancing a step or two, and speaking so low as not to be overheard by Mrs. Mordaunt, he continued, "If you do not feel perfectly contented with the explanation I have now made, I shall be very ready to give you any other sort of satisfaction which you may require."

"Since, I presume, you must have good grounds," replied Mr. Mordaunt aloud, "for believing that there can be no mistake in what you have just asserted respecting Augusta's sentiments both towards yourself and Lord Delmore, I cannot have any hesitation in acknowledging that you have placed the case in a most unanswerable point of view. It is one that surprises me considerably; for I had not previously entertained the least suspicion of either of the facts you have stated to me. We have all been under a delusion; and as it appears that my daughter has been the only person really deserving of blame, she must take the consequences of her own misguided folly."

It is unnecessary to describe minutely what passed during the remainder of the evening. Of course, Miss Mordaunt did not come down-

stairs again. Mr. Stafford pleaded fatigue as an excuse for retiring to rest very early. He took leave of his host and hostess, and of Edward, with cold and ceremonious civility: and perhaps no four persons ever separated with feelings of greater satisfaction at finding themselves relieved from enduring the *gêne* of each other's society.

CHAPTER IV.

If a daughter you have, she's the plague of your life,
* * * * * *
When scarce in their teens, they have wit to perplex us;
With letters and lovers for ever they vex us;
While each still rejects the fair suitor you've brought her:
Oh, what a plague is an obstinate daughter!

The Duenna.

THERE are few people who have not right feeling or good sense enough to refrain from publishing to the world the little dissensions that take place within their own domestic circle; but scarcely anybody has not at some time or other known the secret sensation of discomfort and apprehension which is experienced by all the members of a family party, when they first reassemble after a considerable offence has been committed by one of their number, or an unfortunate occurrence has jarred their usual harmony.

Such were the feelings which disquieted the

inmates of Mordaunt, and such was their situation, when they prepared themselves to meet at breakfast on the morning of Mr. Stafford's departure.

Mrs. Mordaunt was the first who made her appearance. Her husband entered the room soon afterwards; he looked in a very bad humour, and as he took his seat at the table, he observed bitterly,

"I should not formerly have believed that I could ever have regretted being deprived of the sight of Stafford's pretty face. Of course, you know that he is gone."—Then, after a long pause, he added: "This is really a most unfortunate and disagreeable business,—it puts me out of all patience to think of it. Since Nature has made young ladies so abominably perverse, we ought to consider ourselves lucky in being blessed with only one daughter.—Pray, have you seen Miss Mordaunt this morning?"

"No; she did not come into my room, as usual. I imagine she feels ashamed of herself, and is afraid to venture into our presence."

"She certainly has good reason to be so." Then addressing Edward, who had just joined them, he said,

"Go to your sister, and tell her from me that we have been at breakfast some time. If

she has not imposed upon herself the penance of fasting, she had better come down immediately, as I shall not think it necessary to have the tea-equipage kept standing here all day upon her account."

Edward obeyed his father's order without making any reply, and soon returned, accompanied by the poor culprit Augusta, who looked an object of terror and distress, and did not dare to raise her eyes towards Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt. The latter simply wished her good morning, while the former made her a stiff sort of bow. She sneaked up to her vacant chair, and bent her head over her plate; but the tears rolled rapidly down her cheeks, and though she affected to be occupied with her breakfast, she found it impossible to attempt to eat.

Not a word was spoken by anybody, till at length Edward endeavoured to relieve his sister's embarrassment by making some common-place remark. This was answered concisely by his mother, and then the party relapsed into silence.

As soon as Mr. Mordaunt had drunk his tea, he rose and left the room. Augusta looked wistfully after him. She longed to implore his pardon, but she was too much afraid of him to presume to do so.

Mrs. Mordaunt got up likewise, desired Edward to ring the bell, and was walking towards the door, when her unhappy daughter, who was no longer able to endure her displeasure, sprang forward, and throwing herself at her feet, besought her to take pity upon her, to intercede for her with her father, and (unworthy as she was) to forgive her.

Mrs. Mordaunt could not remain unmoved by this touching appeal, which was earnestly seconded by Edward. She raised Augusta from the ground, and spoke to her calmly and kindly; but as she thought it right to make her feel that she had behaved extremely ill, she neither treated her with her accustomed affection, nor consented to restore her entirely to her favour. She promised to try to soothe Mr. Mordaunt's just resentment; yet she gave her to understand that she must not expect, for some time at least, that her parents could regard her with their former indulgent partiality and confidence.

It cut Augusta to the heart to have forfeited her mother's good opinion; it distressed her to have offended her father; and it humbled her to the dust to discover from some of Mrs. Mordaunt's observations, that she was supposed to be attached to an admirer who had be-

not like Stafford as a husband, I think you were quite right in making him acquainted with your sentiments. I should have been wretched had I imagined the possibility of your entering into any marriage against your own inclination; and such an alliance would have brought certain unhappiness to yourself."—Then, in a more playful tone, he added: "If this same Stafford had become my brother-in-law, I should have earnestly striven to form a different opinion of him; but as it is, I may now confess to you without offence, that I always considered him a most contemptible, vain, and insufferable puppy."

Augusta was much touched by her brother's kindness.

"It is very good of you," answered she, "to judge me so favourably. I am aware that if you had despised and reviled me, it would have been no more than I had deserved. You cannot imagine how much I dreaded seeing you, Charles—how ready I was to sink with shame when you entered the room yesterday."

"Well, well," replied her brother, "you find I am not so formidable a person as you believed me; therefore I hope you will never be afraid of me again. We will talk no more of disagreeable subjects, and think no more of

unpleasant affairs. Life is too short to be consumed in fretting; which does people no sort of good, but only ruins their health, and makes them look old and ugly before their time. 'Away with melancholy' has always been my maxim; I have urged it in precept, and followed it in practice; and before I have been at Mordaunt a week, I am much mistaken if I shall not succeed in teaching our whole party here to sing 'Begone, dull care.'"

Augusta was amused with the gaiety of her brother's spirit; and the idea of her father's singing "Begone, dull care," struck her fancy as so irresistibly ludicrous, that she burst out laughing.

Charles was delighted with the happy effect his sally had produced. "I have done wonders already," thought he; "I have only to follow up my advantage." And addressing his sister in a careless voice, he observed—

"It was a great disappointment to me to be unable to join you in town last spring. You must tell me how you liked the bustle and dissipation of a London season. Did you think the balls and gaieties as agreeable and fascinating as you expected them to be?"

"I enjoyed them, I believe, as much as anybody while they were going forward," replied

Augusta, relapsing into a sadder tone; "but *my* gaieties have come to an unfortunate termination."

Charles affected not to understand her meaning.

"They were certainly very unpleasantly concluded," he said, "by the frightful tragedy you enacted at the Opera. I cannot even now reflect without shuddering, upon the danger you were placed in during that horrible scene. — By the way, since you are aware that I have been spending the last ten days at D'Arcy, how does it happen that you have never once had the grace to inquire after the hero who stepped forward to your rescue?"

He looked steadfastly at his sister as he spoke these words. Augusta coloured very deeply, and her lip quivered while she answered—

"As I heard you mention Lord Delmore last night, I concluded he was in good health. I had nothing more to ask. I trusted you would consider, as a matter of course, my feeling duly grateful to your friend for the heroic exertions he made to save me."

"All that is very properly, but coldly expressed. Are you conscious that his own hands were painfully burnt in extinguishing the fire?"

"I knew it partly at the moment; but I

believe he left town the next day, and until you wrote my father word that you were staying at D'Arcy, I never learned what had become of him. I hope he has now quite recovered the injury he received in my cause?"

"Not entirely; the beauty of Lionel's fingers is still considerably impaired. That, however, is a matter of trifling importance; I much wish that I had no cause of greater uneasiness upon his account. When I arrived at D'Arcy, I was extremely shocked to observe the extraordinary depression of his spirits; he quite gives me the idea of a person who has some secret distress preying upon his mind. There has he been shut up in his old chateau, and living the life of a hermit, ever since he left London. Nothing interests him, nothing seems to give him pleasure. Such a state of melancholy apathy is most unnatural—it is deplorable! I flatter myself he was in some degree cheered by my visit; but as I could not persuade him to admit me into his confidence, and had therefore no better guide than my own conjectures to enable me to ascertain the real seat of the evil which so heavily afflicts him, I had not, of course, the least hope of possessing the power of removing it. It is very strange! Do you think, Augusta, that *you* can assist

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she answered—

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doing anything seriously wrong. *That* error was duly repented; and I consider Lionel's character as being altogether one of the most amiable and strictly honourable I ever met with."

"The error you allude to," observed Augusta, in an unsteady, inquiring tone, "was his having lost an immense sum of money at play, was it not?"

"You are perfectly right in your conjecture: but who could possibly have told you that story?"

"It was partially communicated to me by Lord Delmore himself last year at Mr. Wingfield's, when he was expatiating upon the obligations he owed to you."

"If Delmore was really your informant, I shall do him the justice of giving you *my* version of the tale; for I am convinced that, in his confession to you, he placed his own conduct in the most unfavourable point of view."

Charles then proceeded to narrate concisely every circumstance connected with Lord Delmore's gambling embarrassment.

"It was a severe and dreadful lesson to him at the time," concluded he, "but it has proved a salutary one; for I am persuaded that since that moment he has scarcely touched a card, or



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others prevailed upon you to credit injurious representations concerning him?"

"Since you desire me to speak explicitly, I will not deny that I have had good reason to think Lord Delmore's conduct towards me has been most extraordinary and unjustifiable. This is not a mere imagination of my own, for I know that mamma entertained the same opinion of his behaviour."

Captain Mordaunt looked perplexed. "You must answer me one more question," he said, "before I can condemn my friend. Are you sure that you had not given him undue provocation, when he first retaliated, by treating you rather cavalierly; and that you did not afterwards continue to awaken his jealousy by flirting indiscreetly with other admirers?"

"I believe I did once unintentionally offend him in that way last autumn at Estonville," replied Augusta; "but after I met him in town, I can sincerely declare to you that I had no indiscretion of that kind to reproach myself with."

"It is very incomprehensible!" observed Charles. "However strangely Lionel may have acted—whatever false impression he may have conceived respecting your sentiments towards him, there cannot be a doubt of his

still continues undiminished."

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gravely. "If Lord Delmore has i
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his misconduct."

Augusta was terrified by the sud

distinction between acting unhandsomely and acting dishonourably. Of having done the latter, I have no reason to accuse Lord Delmore—however mortified and disgusted I may feel by the line of conduct he has thought proper to pursue. In fact, you may rest assured that from the very beginning of our acquaintance, nothing has ever passed between us that could require, or even justify, the interference of a third person. Trust me, Lord Delmore and I understand each other much better than it is possible for me to make you understand us: and it is my earnest desire that his unfortunate disagreement with *me* should make no difference in *your* feelings towards him;—in short, that you should still remain his friend."

"It would certainly give me great pain," continued Captain Mordaunt thoughtfully, "to find myself obliged to renounce Lionel's friendship;—to do so, too, at a moment when his situation appears to me particularly forlorn, and when he seems peculiarly to stand in need of comfort and kindness. I perceive that, from whatever cause the idea may have originated, you are mutually convinced that your characters and dispositions are unsuited, and that you could not have lived happily together. I shall therefore entirely give up the hope I had

entertained of acting as a mediator between you, and being able to effect a reconciliation between two persons who are both so very dear to me."

"I feel and appreciate the kindness of your intention," said Augusta, "far more deeply than I can express to you; and believe me, I shall look upon your never mentioning this distressing subject to me again, as the greatest proof of your delicate and affectionate consideration for me."

"I will faithfully promise you to abstain from making the slightest allusion to it upon any future occasion; so pray set your mind at rest upon that point. I now regret more than ever that I could not accomplish my visit to London in the spring: had I been with you then, things would perhaps have turned out very differently. I cannot help strongly suspecting that much mischief has resulted from your having been constantly *lié* with a very fascinating, artful, and designing woman. You recollect that I formerly warned you of the danger of contracting a bosom friendship with such a person as Lady Caroline Mortmer; I feel irresistibly tempted to repeat that caution. You unluckily disregarded it in the first instance; and if you persist in doing so at present, I shall only lament your blindness, and

remain silent about her ladyship's merits or demerits for evermore. You need not start from me, and turn away your head; for I must request you to attend to what I am going to say, and to hear me patiently to the end. Are you aware, Augusta, that, in spite of all her coquetry, the high and mighty Lady Caroline has long been secretly attached to her cousin Lionel? and that she has not yet abandoned the hope of being able some day or other to make an impression upon his hitherto obdurate heart? She would not, consequently, scruple to resort to any unprincipled artifice to prevent the probability of his ever being accepted by a rival. You best know if she has employed unfair means to influence you against Delmore, or if she has endeavoured to dupe you for her own selfish purposes. Do not lightly disregard the hint I have just given you; weigh it attentively in your mind, and reconsider well all the circumstances that may be connected with it."

Augusta was much astonished and disquieted by what her brother had just told her, and her reliance in the truth of Lady Caroline Mortimer's statement was considerably shaken. She now remembered, that although her ladyship had professed to feel a sisterly interest in

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that he admired her, she was well disposed to believe that, unless she had been thus insidiously lowered in his estimation, he would never have offered her so contemptuous an insult, as bartering in cold blood his chance of obtaining her affections against a gambling debt to Mr. Stafford. If a lingering suspicion, a hope, of Lionel's having been calumniated, still clung to her imagination, it was suddenly and completely destroyed by her recollecting, that when she had imprudently taunted Mr. Stafford with her knowledge of his supposed secret, he had been so entirely thrown off his guard, that he had fully admitted his guilt, by accusing Philip Mortimer of having communicated to his sister what had taken place between him and Lord Delmore.

All this passed rapidly in Augusta's mind. Charles perceived with great satisfaction the impression which his last argument had made upon her; he watched the changes of her countenance, and he began to entertain sanguine expectations of counteracting Lady Caroline Mortimer's wily schemes, by proving to his sister and to Lionel that they had both been the dupes of her treachery.

This pleasing anticipation vanished, however, when Augusta at length observed,

"I have been considering and reconsidering your warning in every possible point of view; but, after the most impartial examination, I grieve to say, that it cannot materially alter my previous opinion of Lord Delmore's conduct or character. All you formerly told me about Lady Caroline was perfectly just; and if I had not then been too headstrong to attend to your friendly admonition, I should have spared myself much unhappiness. I confess that you have now disclosed to me circumstances relating to this treacherous friend which I very little suspected, and which show me how completely I was at one time deluded by her flattering artifices. You need not fear that she will ever deceive me again: I have bought experience, and have bought it dearly. If Lady Caroline's scheme ends prosperously—if she succeeds in becoming Lady Delmore," (and Augusta's voice trembled as she pronounced the name,) "I shall not envy her. I do not think that such a marriage can prove a happy one. As for myself, the only wish that is now left me, is, that I may be able to regain the affection of my own family."

Charles's warm expressions of attachment to his sister, and the tenderness of his whole manner towards her, seemed to afford her much

comfort and gratification. He saw that all hope of restoring Lionel to her favour was at an end; and he felt extremely glad that he had not subjected his father and mother to another disappointment, by imparting to them the suspicions which had occurred to him at D'Arcy, and the plans he had consequently framed since his arrival at Mordaunt.

Captain Mordaunt and Augusta were still engaged in earnest conversation, when a stout-built pony-carriage, containing a substantial jolly-looking dame, and driven by a little foot-boy who was evidently proud of the office, trotted past the windows.

Miss Mordaunt started up and made her escape before the entrance of the visitor. Her brother was much inclined to follow her example; but just as he was going to bolt out of the window, Mrs. Porter was announced; and upon hearing her name, he concluded she must be the wife of an attorney in the neighbourhood, who was occasionally employed by his father as a man of business.

The lady was a middle-aged woman, with a broad good-humoured vulgar face, a very florid complexion, and a tall portly figure, too much *embonpoint* to be *graceful*. Her dress, which she had wished upon this occasion to be

particularly smart, was extremely staring and gaudy. Her bonnet was made of bright grass-green gauze, and trimmed with a mixture of white and scarlet ribands; she had a gold-coloured silk shawl; and her gown and her gloves, which were the only parts of her attire in corresponding taste, were of a most brilliant shade of blue.

Charles declared afterwards, that her first appearance gave him the idea of an enormous well-fed macaw, and that he felt quite appalled at finding himself *tête-à-tête* with such an extraordinary creature.

In truth, he had little inclination to be left to perform the task of entertaining a guest like Mrs. Porter. He therefore desired that his mother might be instantly informed of her arrival.

It happened that Mrs. Mordaunt had gone out walking; but the servant was not aware of this circumstance, and had consequently admitted her visitor.

Mrs. Porter made Charles a low curtsey, and then advancing nearer to him, "I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you well, sir," she said. "You will excuse the liberty I take in venturing to introduce myself to you. I think myself very fortunate in finding you at home;

for I assure you I have long felt a great desire to have the honour of making your acquaintance."

Charles was much diverted with this address; yet he contrived to return the good lady suitable acknowledgments for her very flattering kindness.

Partly from shyness, and partly from natural awkwardness, she had edged herself into a small French arm-chair, with very little consideration for her own comfort, and (what was perhaps more important) with still less regard for the safety of a valuable china jar which stood just behind her.

Captain Mordaunt invited her to remove to the sofa. "You are very polite, sir," she observed, immediately exchanging her place for the one he had recommended, and adjusting the cushions around her very much to her satisfaction. "Dear me, what a beautifully comfortable sofa this is!"

Charles of course replied that he was extremely glad she found it so.

Mrs. Porter having got over her first embarrassment, did not allow the conversation to languish. She was by nature uncommonly loquacious, and, unfortunately for her friends, she was impressed with a belief that it afforded

them quite as much satisfaction to listen to her, as it gave *her* pleasure to talk to them: consequently, she ran on from one subject to another, without ever thinking it necessary to pause, or to let anybody have an opportunity of answering her.

"Mr. Porter has been away from home upon business for the last fortnight," she said, addressing herself to Charles; "and he took me with him this time for a bit of pleasure. We only got back late last night; which is my reason for not having been over here much sooner to pay my respects to Mrs. and Miss Mordaunt, and to offer them my due congratulations. I trust both the ladies are in good health. I suppose Miss Mordaunt feels rather bashful at present about appearing to morning callers? I suspect that I saw her sitting with you here just now as I drove up to the door, and that she only ran away when she heard the sound of a carriage."

The attorney's lady stared archly in Charles's face, and chuckled at her own wit; and she laughed still more heartily when she saw that he was much confused.

The truth was, Captain Mordaunt perceived that his tormentor's absence had prevented her discovering that his sister's marriage had been

broken off, and therefore that she had sallied forth to her visit under a false impression respecting the circumstances of the family. This placed him in a disagreeable kind of dilemma; but as he did not consider himself called upon to enter into a long explanation with her upon so delicate a subject, he determined to allow her to continue in error.

"Pray, sir, do not distress yourself about my nonsense," continued Mrs. Porter very good-naturedly, when her laugh was over, for she was sorry to observe that he looked really perplexed; "I was not the least affronted with Miss Mordaunt, I assure you. Her behaviour was quite natural under her circumstances; and nothing is so becoming in a young lady, you know, as modesty. I remember that *I* used to act just in the same manner myself when I was similarly situated."

This concluding comparison was almost too much for Charles, and he had the greatest possible difficulty in maintaining anything like a decent appearance of gravity. In order to give a new and more general turn to the discourse, he soon afterwards made some commonplace remark upon the state of the weather.

"It has certainly been very fine lately," answered Mrs. Porter, "but the sky looks rather

unsettled this morning; I am sadly afraid that we shall have rain before night. I consulted the weather-glass (as I always do) before I came out, and I did not find it quite so favourable as I could have wished."

As she spoke, she stole a complacent glance at her own figure in the mirror opposite to her; arranged her red and white ribands; and then turning her head towards the window, and anxiously surveying the clouds, betrayed very clearly the disquietude she was suffering on account of her splendid best bonnet, and the apprehension she felt of having it spoilt by a shower of rain.

Charles endeavoured to set her mind at ease, by expressing it as his decided opinion that no wet was likely to fall until the evening.

"Well, I hope you will prove a true prophet, sir; for I should be very sorry to get a ducking in my way back. 'Rain or shine,' as I said to Mr. Porter before I started, 'I am determined to go to Mordaunt Park to-day.' I would not have put off such a visit for all the world. Besides, to-morrow may be even worse than this morning. An open carriage is, at the very best of times, a dangerous thing to trust to in this uncertain climate. I have often set out to a ride in a fine broiling sun, and been

half-drowned in a thunderstorm before I got home again. My pony, too, is none of the quietest: it has been a useful little animal to us, but it has rather more spirit than *I* like. My husband laughs at my fears, and is uncivil enough to tell me, that when Dick has *my* weight to steady him, there can be no danger."

Charles felt secretly much inclined to agree with the attorney; but he took care not to express his acquiescence in an opinion so unflattering to his lady.

"You must do me the favour," pursued she, "just to look at my pony Dick when he comes out of the stable. I dare say you are fond of horses, and a good judge of them. I heard last year of your fame in the hunting-field, and I make no doubt you have plenty of fine horses of your own."

"I confess," answered Charles with a smile, "that I have always been rather proud of my horses. I have one very beautiful creature now, which has been generally admired by the ladies. I did not think it worth while to bring any of them here at present; so I cannot propose myself the pleasure of showing you my favourite."

"Certainly it was not; but perhaps I may get a sight of it at some future opportunity.

country."

"I do indeed, most extremely
to Mordaunt prepared to be pl
place, the neighbourhood, ar
connected with it. It did not
expectations: and I trust you w
I have now a right to feel that I
part of the world,—in short, to c
home."

Mrs. Porter looked excessively
this speech, and bowed and simp
took it as a sort of personal co
herself.

"You have not found leisure,
she said, "to visit many of our di
yet. There are several gentlemen
other sights well worth your seeing
tonville Castle is without comparis
est mansion and domain in all this

"I have been at Estonville,"

were staying at Mordaunt last winter. I am far better acquainted with all that is going on around me than you may suspect; and you may be sure that such an interesting event as your visit here, furnished subject for very general conversation."

At this instant the servant re-entered the room to say, that as he could not find his mistress, he concluded she must be out walking.

"I feel much vexed to miss seeing Mrs. Mordaunt," muttered Mrs. Porter in a half-audible tone. Then turning to address the servant, she added in a louder voice,

"Will you be so good as to tell the boy to bring my pony-carriage round to the door directly?"

Charles asked her if she would not take any refreshment before her departure: but this she declined.

"I expect to get home by dinner-time," she observed: "as my husband is quite a man of business, it does not suit us to keep fashionable hours. We dine at three o'clock, and have a comfortable supper at ten, when the day's work is over. To confess the truth, too, I am rather in a hurry to be back upon another account. After having been absent for a

fortnight, I have of course a number of little domestic concerns to look into. Though *I* say it, who perhaps should not say it, I flatter myself that I contrive to manage my house tolerably well, and to keep my servants in as good order as anybody; but when the eye of the mistress is not upon them, things cannot be expected to go on exactly as they ought to do. It has not yet fallen in your way, sir, to consider all this: but when you are a married man, and the cares of a family come upon you, you will very soon learn to understand it." Then, as if a sudden recollection had come across her, she went on upon another track.

"As I shall not now see Mrs. Mordaunt herself, may I venture to request you will have the condescension just to mention to Mr. Mordaunt, that Mr. Porter had fully intended to come with me this morning, but he was unexpectedly obliged to ride in a different direction upon pressing business. He will not fail, however, to take the earliest opportunity of doing himself the honour of waiting upon Mr. Mordaunt, and upon you also, sir."

"I will not forget to deliver your message," rejoined Charles: "and though it would give us much pleasure to see Mr. Porter, we should be extremely sorry if he thought it necessary

to make us a visit as a point of ceremony, if it happened to be the least inconvenient to him to do so. Since he seems to be particularly engaged just at present, pray tell him to consider that we have taken the will for the deed."

"By no means, sir, by no means," exclaimed Mrs. Porter, "that must not be. You are very kind; but he will certainly ride over, as in duty bound."

Then, having been informed that her pony-carriage was ready, she got up to depart, but stood lingering for a minute or two, as if there was still something more which she wished, yet scarcely knew how to say or to ask. At length she took courage to remark—

"I suppose I must not presume to inquire how soon the great and joyful event is to take place?"

Charles was quite confounded by so direct an appeal; but dreading an *éclaircissement* more than ever, he attempted to silence the good lady at once, by replying—

"You must excuse me, Mrs. Porter, if I decline answering that question. I feel an awkwardness which prevents my gratifying your curiosity upon that subject; but you will, I believe, very soon hear everything that is to be heard about it from others."

"To be sure I shall," continued she, looking rather abashed at her own indiscretion. "I had no right to expect that you would tell me; and perhaps I did very wrong in asking you. But as I did not mean the question as an offence, I trust you will not look upon it as one. I will be careful never to venture again to pry into your secret: but you must just allow me to say, that whenever a certain nameless circumstance does occur, I most sincerely hope that it will be productive of every possible blessing and happiness to every one of the parties concerned."

As she concluded these words, she extended her large hand towards Charles, and shook his very heartily; partly in proof of the warmth and sincerity of the good wishes she had expressed, and partly as a confirmatory act of reconciliation after the unlucky breach of delicacy which she had committed.

There was something so irresistibly good-humoured even in Mrs. Porter's vulgarity, that Captain Mordaunt spoke truly, when he told her he felt much obliged to her for her kindness. He escorted her to the door, and having duly admired the appearance of her pony, prepared to hand her into her carriage.

"You must permit me to thank you, sir,"

said she, as she placed her foot upon the step, "for the gratifying attentions you have shown me to-day. I beg, too, that you will be good enough to present my respectful compliments to the ladies: and at some future opportunity, when you are staying at Mordaunt, if you should happen to pass by our house, I should feel greatly honoured if you would condescend to look in and give us a call. Indeed, I should be extremely proud at any time, if I could have it in my power, in my humble way, to afford any hospitality to you or to your fair lady that is to be."

Charles promised that he would pay her and Mr. Porter a visit before he left the country; and she drove off bowing and smiling, thinking him one of the handsomest and politest young gentlemen she had ever seen in her life, and fully persuaded that he must have considered her a particularly agreeable woman in return.

He stood for some moments watching her departing progress with a mixture of amusement and relief. The dread of finding himself forced at last to enter into the history of his sister's affairs with such a person as Mrs. Porter, and of being compelled to hear her blunt, coarse remarks upon Augusta's folly and Mr. Stafford's shocking conduct, had become almost

insufferable. He had been much afraid, too, that her indignation would be vehemently roused against himself, if any unlucky accident led her to discover that he had been wilfully keeping her in ignorance of so important a fact as the rupture of the intended marriage in his family. From her latter allusions to his matrimonial prospects, he strongly suspected that she had imagined him to be Mr. Stafford: and he trembled when he thought that if his mother came in from her walk before he had fairly got rid of his companion, she would inevitably betray who he really was.

Mr. Mordaunt was excessively diverted with his son's account of Mrs. Porter's visit; it put him into a much better humour during the whole of the evening than he had ever been in before since Mr. Stafford's departure.

"It must have been an admirable scene!" said he. "I hope the attorney will not be jealous when he hears of your long *tête-à-tête* with his lady. Charles, Charles, you may have given that worthy man just cause of uneasiness. There can be no doubt that your charmer paid you the compliment of mistaking you for Stafford. As soon, therefore, as she learns that the alliance with Augusta has been sud-

denly broken off, she will imagine that, after having been dazzled with *her* superior attractions, the intended bridegroom found it no longer possible to fulfil his engagement with his former love, and fled the country in a state of distraction and despair."

Imogen. Continues well, my lord? I
you?

* * * *

Is he disposed to mirth? I

* * * *

When he was here,
He did incline to sadness; a
Not knowing why.

CAPTAIN MORDAUNT determined
to Estonville Castle, to give Lo
messages to Lady Agnes Mortimer
her, Lady Estonville, and seve
assembled at luncheon.

The countess received him ver
introduced him to her

short cut across the country; and, as he took possession of a chair beside her sister, he thought Lady Agnes was much prettier than he had expected to see her. The warm and unaffected interest with which she listened to all his details about Lionel, soon led him to feel as much at home with her as if they had known each other for years; and the natural simplicity of her manner charmed him the more, from the strong contrast it formed to Lady Caroline's fascinating but artificial style of behaviour.

He spoke to her in general terms of her cousin's present dejection, and said 'he hoped that his tour upon the Continent would improve his spirits.'

"I wish I could feel equally sanguine upon that point," replied Lady Agnes. "Poor Lionel (and perhaps with some reason) has never been inclined to be in good humour with the world. The only thing likely to have reconciled him to it completely, and to have rendered him permanently comfortable, would have been his making a happy marriage. And of that," concluded she with a sigh, "there seems to be very little prospect at present."

"Indeed I fear that there is not much," continued Charles. "I shall endeavour to

persuade him next winter to think about brushing up his house: it appears to be getting much out of repair from mere neglect."

"It is a thousand pities that it should be allowed to do so. If there is anybody who can prevail upon Lionel to take an interest in his inheritance, and to preserve the poor old walls at D'Arcy from falling into decay, it must be you, Captain Mordaunt: there is no one else who possesses the least real influence over his mind."

Lady Estonville rose from luncheon.

"Lady Agnes," said Charles, as he accompanied her to the library, "you are probably aware that my sister's marriage is entirely at an end?"

"I had heard this reported," answered she; "but I should of course have made no allusion to so delicate a subject, had you not mentioned it yourself. Permit me to add, that I feel much flattered by your having done so, and that I grieve sincerely for the vexation which I fear this unexpected circumstance must have occasioned to all your family."

"You are very kind," replied Charles. "I have no doubt we are all blamed by our neighbours, and that many false and exaggerated stories are circulated about us in the world. I

care very little for what is now said, and will soon be forgotten by indifferent people; but I should be glad to endeavour to justify Augusta's conduct—at least to place it in the fairest light—to those by whom I wish she should be thought well of. She has been very foolish, perhaps I ought to say very blameable, in accepting a person she never fancied; yet I hope that you, Lady Agnes, will be disposed to judge her charitably."

"That I shall, I assure you. I once hoped that Miss Mordaunt and I might have been friends; but I found that she was less inclined to like me, than I felt to like and admire her. I was sorry to hear of her engagement to Mr. Stafford, for I did not think it probable that *he* would either possess her affections or secure her happiness. She is very young and very inexperienced, and I much fear—" (here Lady Agnes paused for a moment—) "that she has unconsciously taken injudicious models, and been induced to listen to bad advice."

"She has indeed. How truly you have read her character, and how perfectly you have understood her conduct!"

"For fear you should be led to give me more credit for discernment than I really deserve," answered Lady Agnes, with a slight

blush, "I ought perhaps to confess to you, that in this particular instance I had a motive for wishing to be very clear-sighted."

Lord Estonville's entrance interrupted the conversation between his daughter and Captain Mordaunt. The peer expressed much pleasure at seeing the latter; inquired with *empressement* after Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt, and with great affectation of interest after Augusta; and begged Charles to fix an early period for coming to spend some days at Estonville.

Captain Mordaunt assured him he should be delighted to do so; but added, that he must in the first instance consult his family about their future engagements.

Lord Estonville repeated, that whenever Charles could come, he should be equally happy to receive him. He then made him many apologies for being obliged to leave him so soon; but informed him, that there was a troublesome man of business waiting for him in his own room.

As Captain Mordaunt rode home, he thought over every word that Lady Agnes Mortimer had spoken; recalled the affectionate anxiety of her look and manner when Lord Delmore had been the subject of their conversation, and pondered

upon the lively interest she evidently took in all that concerned her cousin; until he became perfectly convinced that, unknown to herself, she was deeply attached to Lionel.

"Poor thing!" thought he, "Delmore will sooner or later discover the real nature of her sentiments towards him; and whenever he does so, he must have a hard heart indeed if he is not greatly touched. Lady Agnes seems every way worthy of obtaining his affections. They will be a happy couple. Perhaps, after all, *she* is better suited to him than Augusta would have been." And the sigh which accompanied this last reflection was no doubt breathed entirely upon his sister's account.

That very evening Charles Mordaunt wrote a letter to Lord Delmore. He briefly informed him of the situation in which he had found affairs at Mordaunt; and then proceeded to tell him he had seen Lady Agnes Mortimer, and was very ready to admit that he (Lionel) had not said at all too much in her praise. He insinuated that, during his interview with her ladyship, they had talked almost exclusively of *him;* but that it would be encouraging his vanity far too much to repeat to him everything that had passed. Finally, and seriously, he

assured him that he had been quite charmed with the kind solicitude his cousin had expressed about him.

Lady Caroline Mortimer had been much startled and alarmed the day before Charles's visit, by hearing an indistinct rumour of Mr. Stafford's sudden departure from Mordaunt. She had no means of obtaining any certain information upon the subject that afternoon: she affected totally to disbelieve the story; but she felt very uneasy, and was haunted all night by unpleasant dreams.

When she came down to breakfast the next morning, she observed, in a careless tone, 'that she supposed no one had learned anything more about Mr. Stafford?'

"We can give you no intelligence of what has occurred at Mordaunt," replied Lord Estonville; "but I may perhaps be able to supply you with news from other parts of the world."

And as he spoke, he unlocked the letter-bag, which had just been brought into the room.

It contained several newspapers, and a number of despatches of various dimensions. The Earl handed some of these to his guests, and to Lady Estonville, and then began opening his own letters. Lady Caroline watched

this operation in silence, until he threw her a curious-looking little note which had been enclosed in an envelope. She perceived that it was from her brother Philip; and as he was in general a remarkably idle correspondent, she broke the seal with almost trembling eagerness.

The writer's sentiments were couched in the following concise and characteristic terms:—

"My dearest Car,

"You well know that at all times I dislike writing; and more particularly do I hate it when I have any disagreeable information to communicate. I have just seen Stafford, who tells me that he and *la belle Auguste* have had a desperate quarrel, (what fools!) and that the marriage is off most decidedly, and for ever! He has acted like a madman, and he must abide by his loss. It may prove a gain to others; but you are well aware that Lionel will not be one of that number—that care has been taken to prevent the possibility of *his* ever profiting by his rival's discomfiture.

"So no more at present, (as the servants say,) from your loving brother till death,

"Philip Mortimer."

Lady Caroline's astonishment upon perusing this extraordinary note was only equalled by her consternation. For an instant she entirely lost her habitual self-possession, and tearing the unwelcome paper into twenty pieces, she crushed the fragments together in her hand with a gesture of most impatient indignation.

She could not endure the idea of her plans being thus completely frustrated, at the very moment when she had considered their accomplishment as infallible. She had the vexation, too, of suspecting that their failure had been occasioned by her own over-anxiety to promote them. Instead of resting satisfied with their success, she had attempted a master-stroke of policy—had overreached herself, and by so doing had destroyed all the fruits of her former labours.

"If I mistake not," said Lord Estonville to his daughter, "the letter I gave you just now was from Philip. Does he talk of coming down here?"

"No; he does not even allude to such an intention."

"The sight of a despatch from *him*," continued the earl, "is so rare an occurrence, that I always fancy it must contain some wonderful announcement."

Lady Caroline had by this time reassumed her usually gay manner.

"The intelligence Philip sends me," replied she with a smile, "is certainly *wonderful;* but it will not *surprise* you, for you have already heard it. My kind brother tells me that anybody in London may supply me with London news, but that *he* writes for the express purpose of giving me the earliest correct intimation of an occurrence relating to a particular friend of mine in this neighbourhood. He has heard from undoubted authority that there has been a violent disagreement between all the good people at Mordaunt, and that Augusta's marriage with Mr. Stafford is consequently never to take place."

"This is indeed very strange!" observed Lady Estonville. "It is curious, too, that Philip, who is in town, should have learned sooner what has happened in the interior of the Mordaunt family, than we have done, who are living within a few miles of them."

Lady Caroline made no answer to this remark; though she joined very freely in the discussion upon her friend's concerns, which occupied the whole party during the rest of breakfast.

After Lady Estonville had established her-

self at her work as usual, she soon became so deeply engrossed in counting the threads of her canvass, that she was unable to attend to anything else.

"Have you any message to send to Mrs. Mordaunt, mamma?" inquired Lady Caroline. "I am much inclined to ride over to see poor Augusta."

"Had you not better wait," said the countess, looking up from her work, "till you know the particulars of Miss Mordaunt's disagreement with Mr. Stafford?"

"She will tell me all about it herself," replied Lady Caroline. "Considering the sort of terms which we are upon, she would naturally think it very unkind if I did not go near her in her present circumstances, or attempt to console her in her desertion."

Lady Estonville made no farther remark, but bent her head again over her unfinished flower. Lady Caroline retired to put on her habit; but she was in no hurry to set out, for as she wished to find Augusta alone, she fancied she had a better chance of doing so if she did not arrive at Mordaunt very early.

When her ladyship reached her destination, she was told that both the ladies were at home; and Mrs. Mordaunt very soon joined her.

"How is Augusta?" asked Lady Caroline, in a tone of deep interest. "I am aware of everything that has happened; and, delicate as I know her health has been for some time past, I cannot help feeling *most* anxious to learn that it has not now suffered."

"Thank you much for your kindness," replied Mrs. Mordaunt, who did not particularly like being interrogated in this sort of way, and who had no desire to admit more than was necessary,—"I trust Augusta's health is by no means seriously affected; yet she is altogether in a nervous, excited state just at the present moment. When she heard that you were here, she begged me to tell you, with her best love, that she did not feel equal to seeing you to-day."

Lady Caroline was both surprised and dismayed by this message; but she returned immediately to the charge, and merely changed the mode of her attack.

"Do you think it is good for her," she said, in a thoughtful, insinuating voice, "to shut herself up, and refuse to see even her most intimate friends? Would it not be better she should get over those meetings which she naturally dreads? Surely, the longer they are delayed, the more fearful will they become."

excitement: she afterwards became restless and uncomfortable from merely knowing that she was still under the same roof with herself; and she walked backwards and forwards to the window, with a hope of seeing Lady Caroline's horses brought round to the door.

She was thus employed, when she heard some one enter her room. She turned to discover who the intruder might be,—and great was her consternation when she perceived her mother, closely followed by her dreaded guest.

Poor Augusta was at no time able to disguise her feelings; and for some moments they now so completely overcame her, that Mrs. Mordaunt sincerely repented having brought Lady Caroline to visit her. By degrees, however, she grew more composed; declared she was ashamed of her own folly, and exerted herself to talk as usual.

Lady Caroline had been prepared to find her victim agitated and miserable, and the tender kindness of her manner towards her was irresistibly winning. Miss Mordaunt could not indeed be again deceived by her professions, but she found it impossible to continue to feel angry with her; and before they had

been a quarter of an hour together, her resentment against her was softened, and the dislike she had begun to entertain for her had entirely vanished.

Lady Caroline did not remain with Augusta long. "I must not fatigue you by an unreasonable visit to-day," said she; "but I will look in upon you again very soon."

Then, as she affectionately embraced her, she added in a lower voice, "I am dying to talk to you of all that has occurred, and to hear your own real opinion of Mr. Stafford's conduct. From what I have learned from others, I am afraid I must quite give him up."

"I have nothing to tell you," answered Augusta aloud, "beyond the simple fact that I am not going to be married. I have no wish to blame Mr. Stafford, or to prejudice you against him. I am aware that you had not formerly a very high opinion of his worth; and I assure you, that was has passed here lately need not lower him in your estimation. The subject is altogether a very distressing one to me; therefore let me request you, as the greatest kindness you can do me, never to allude to it again."

Lady Caroline was completely silenced by this reply; and although she felt excessively provoked at discovering that Augusta was inclined to escape from the toils in which she had been endeavouring to entangle her, she resolved to do everything in her power to regain the influence she had once possessed over her mind. She had still an object of deep interest to herself to follow up; and as she rode home, she reflected anxiously upon the line of conduct it would be most judicious to adopt.

"It is evident," thought she, "that Augusta has been tutored by Mrs. Mordaunt; and she has performed the part that has been dictated to her very prettily to-day. But she will not always have her mother at her elbow to prompt and support her. She is a soft, simple girl, and may be very easily led or misled by anybody who will take the trouble of studying her character. She fancies she has convinced me that I have lost all control over her opinions and her actions; but I shall be much mistaken if she does not find that I can prove rather more than a match for her still."

Four days after the visit which has just been described, Lady Caroline Mortimer again presented herself at Mordaunt. She was accom-

panied by some ladies who were staying at Estonville, and who chanced to be acquainted with Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter.

"You must treat me as Lady Estonville this morning," observed her ladyship gaily, "for I have undertaken to be mamma's representative. She meant to have come here herself,—but you know how idle she always feels about a drive. I happened to have a great fancy to supply her place, so I hinted that the cross-roads would shake her unmercifully; and, in short, I had no great difficulty in persuading her to resume her tent-stitch. And now, Mrs. Mordaunt, I almost blush to avow the very forward commission with which I am charged to one of your family:—my father actually desired me to attempt to carry off your son."

Then turning towards Augusta, she added, "Do you think that Captain Mordaunt is at home?"

"I suspect that both my brothers are gone out riding; but I will see if I can find Charles."

"No, no," exclaimed Lady Caroline, detaining her; "you shall not take that trouble, for all the world. If he is out, it would be of no use; and if he is in the house, he will perhaps make his appearance without seeking.

At any rate, I can leave my message for him with you, which will do just as well as seeing him. I suppose," she concluded in a whisper, "that it would be quite in vain to ask you all to come to Estonville at present?"

Augusta shook her head, as she replied in the same low tone, "I fear it would be—quite."

Lady Caroline's conversation afterwards became general, and was even more lively and animated than usual. She treated Miss Mordaunt with the kind familiarity of a very intimate friend; but none of her remarks were addressed particularly to *her*, nor did she seem to feel the least wish to draw her apart from the rest of the company.

Augusta inquired after Lady Agnes.

"She is in excellent health," answered her ladyship; "and you will find her as good and as quiet as ever. I had forgotten that she desired me to give her love to you."

Then lowering her voice so as to be heard by Augusta alone, she observed, "To say the truth, poor dear Agnes was dying to come here with us to-day; but as we had no room for her in the carriage, I affected not to perceive it."

The two Mordaunts were just preparing to mount their horses, when Lady Estonville's carriage drove into the stable-yard.

"If we had any gallantry," said Edward with a smile, as he put his foot into the stirrup, "we should go back to pay our respects to my mother's fair guests."

Instead of laughing at such a chivalrous idea, as his brother expected he would have done, Charles hesitated for an instant, and then desired the groom to inquire particularly the names of all the visitors.

"If the countess," he observed, "should have honoured us so far as to have come herself, it might indeed be right to pay her the compliment of asking her how she feels after so great an exertion as a drive."

Edward looked at him with surprise.

"Lady Estonville ought to be much flattered. Or did you only mention *her* name as an excuse to conceal your reluctance to leave her fascinating daughter Lady Caroline?"

"I hate Lady Caroline Mortimer!" exclaimed Charles impatiently; and at that moment the groom came back to bring him the information he had required. Captain Mordaunt had no sooner received it than he vaulted into his saddle.

"To convince you of my sincerity," said he, "let us now be off, Edward, without farther delay."

He put his horse into a canter as he spoke, and the brothers were speedily out of sight of home.

It was to no purpose that Lady Caroline lingered at Mordaunt with the hope of seeing Charles. She told Mrs. Mordaunt she trusted she would be able to spare her son; and she requested Augusta to persuade him to go the next day to Estonville Castle.

"He promised," she concluded, "to pay us a visit; and I was directed to propose to him to return with us this morning, but his absence has put that plan quite out of the question."

"I have no doubt," replied Augusta, "that Charles will have much pleasure in accepting Lord Estonville's kind invitation to-morrow."

Lady Caroline directed one of her penetrating glances towards Miss Mordaunt, as she remarked,

"You have answered very civilly for your brother, my dear: I am not confident that he would have made as grateful a speech for himself. I had not *formerly* the vanity to imagine that he found the society at Estonville very

agreeable to him, or that we had any of us the happiness of being much suited to his taste."

Augusta was so conscious of the truth of this observation that she scarcely knew how to answer it. Her companion was curious to see what effect it would have upon her; for she had picked up from her mother's conversation, that Captain Mordaunt had talked a great deal to her sister the morning she had herself missed seeing him, and also that Lord Delmore had been the subject of their discussion.

In spite of the aversion Charles Mordaunt had expressed for Lady Caroline Mortimer, he went the following day to Estonville. He was just telling Lady Agnes that he had written Lord Delmore a long description of their last interview, when Lady Caroline came forward with one of her most bewitching smiles, and interrupted him.

"I understand from Augusta," she said, "that you have been staying at D'Arcy. I want you to tell me *truly* how you left poor Lionel? I fear his spirits are worse than indifferent. I am curious to know too, exactly, what are his plans for the future? I am aware that he is going abroad, but I suppose only for a few months. *You* are always admitted into his confidence, and I have no doubt you have

now been giving him very judicious advice: so, pray sit down, and let me hear all and everything about him."

Charles was extremely provoked at her ladyship's having broken off his conversation with her sister, and he would at any rate have felt little inclination to gratify her curiosity about her cousin. He could not refuse taking the chair she pointed out to him; but, though he spoke long of Lord Delmore and of D'Arcy, he contrived to give her a slender proportion of real information respecting either: and when the dressing-bell relieved him from the necessity of answering any more of her questions, he left her almost as much in the dark as she had been before she asked them.

At dinner Captain Mordaunt placed himself next to Lady Agnes; and Lady Caroline was much provoked by contrasting the easy and animated style in which he talked to her sister, with the coldness and restraint invariably visible in his manner when he conversed with herself. In the evening this difference was still more striking: his thus daring in her very presence to admire another, was a deep and unpardonable offence; and the dislike she had formerly felt for him became increased to something little short of absolute hatred.

Charles was not a sort of person she was inclined to fancy. Before she was acquainted with him she had desired to insinuate herself into his good graces because he was Lord Delmore's friend; and she had only attempted to captivate him afterwards, that she might enjoy the triumph of seeing him added to the train of her admirers. She knew that her sister's case was perfectly dissimilar. She was aware that, if he became attached to Lady Agnes, it was not unlikely that his attachment might be returned; and that it might lead to an alliance very advantageous for them both. Yet she was cruel and selfish enough to determine to throw every obstacle in the way of such a prospect; and, to sum up the measure of her heartless vanity, she even indulged sentiments of jealous rivalry against her own sister.

While Lady Caroline took care to dissemble her resentment against Captain Mordaunt, she contrived, with an affectation of artless gaiety to seize every opportunity of tormenting Lady Agnes, by quizzing her about the flattering attentions she received from her "devoted admirer:" and when she happened to speak to Charles, unheard by the rest of the party, she insinuated in a confidential tone "that poor Agnes had certainly transferred her affections

from her first love to his brother Lionel;" and then she pretended very kindly to deplore the utter hopelessness of such an unlucky passion.

Lady Agnes was much annoyed by her sister's raillery; but, gentle as she was, she possessed great firmness of character, and she resolved not to be laughed out of talking to a person whose conversation she found particularly entertaining. She admired Captain Mordaunt's frankness, she appreciated his merit, and she was much gratified by the preference he displayed for her upon all occasions. In short, his society became so agreeable to her, that she felt quite sorry when his visit drew near to a conclusion.

Charles perceived that Lady Caroline did not approve of his attentions to her sister, but, instead of discontinuing them upon that account, he only redoubled them more openly. He thought Lady Agnes the most interesting and amiable girl he had ever met with: he could not doubt that she found pleasure in conversing with him, but he never suspected that this was upon his own account; he imagined it to proceed entirely from reflected affection for her cousin. She spoke to him frequently of Augusta; still he believed that she only took an interest in his sister because Lord Delmore

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hear what he was saying, and he also fancied that, when his speech was concluded, she smiled upon him more graciously than usual.

He took leave of her with reluctance, and after they parted she still occupied all his thoughts: her image accompanied him to Mordaunt; it was constantly present to his imagination in his waking hours, and it haunted him agreeably in his dreams.

CHAPTER VI.

Sous le nom de l'Amitié
Souvent l'Amour se glisse,
Et dans le précipice
On tombe de moitié,
Sans se douter,
Sous le nom de l'Amitié.

Romance.

Charles Mordaunt's second visit at Estonville passed very much in the same manner as the first. His brother had received and accepted an invitation to accompany him; and they found the party so attractive, that they did not go back to Mordaunt till within two days of the period when Charles was obliged to set out for Scotland.

The evening before his departure, he imagined that Lady Agnes Mortimer appeared more thoughtful than usual; and he also remarked that she was rather absent.

He felt depressed and uncomfortable himself, without knowing exactly why he was so;

and as he sat beside her, watching the progress of a piece of netting which became entangled at almost every stitch, they neither of them seemed disposed to sustain any very connected conversation. It was the first time that Charles had recollected what it was to be dull or uneasy when he was in Lady Agnes's society; he feared she must think him very stupid and disagreeable, and he became extremely vexed and mortified with himself.

"Agnes and Captain Mordaunt appear to be carrying on a very lively *tête-à-tête*," said Lady Caroline, addressing herself to a young man who was standing near her. "I hope they have not had a quarrel. After having lived so long 'in sweetest harmony,' it would be particularly unfortunate if any little disagreement should occur to disturb their concord on the very eve of their separation. Did I feel sure that my services were required in that way, I should be much inclined to volunteer acting the charitable part of a peace-maker between them."

"If I am not mistaken," replied her companion, with a smile, "your ladyship's mediation would not be very gratefully received. The lady and gentleman certainly seem at this moment to be under some embarrassment, but

that is perhaps by no means unnatural. We have only to hope that all will be speedily and happily explained."

No *éclaircissement* took place, however. Charles and Edward intended to depart immediately after breakfast the following morning; and when the former mentioned to Lord Estonville that such was their purpose, it struck him that the earl listened rather stiffly to his communication, and that his manner towards him became unusually cold.

The breakfast was concluded, the party had begun to disperse, and the Mordaunts had just ordered their horses to be brought to the door, when Charles heard Lady Agnes say something about walking to her flower-garden.

"Are you going there now?" inquired he, catching at a pretence for lingering a little while longer where he was.

"I thought of doing so presently," replied her ladyship.

"Will you allow me to accompany you?" pursued Captain Mordaunt. "You know that I cannot pretend to understand flowers, but I have at least taste enough to admire that spot. I hope, too, that you will give me one of your beautiful roses to carry home to Augusta."

"I shall have great pleasure," answered Lady Agnes, "in gathering a nosegay for your sister; and, as you seem to be in a hurry, I will put on my bonnet directly."

"How amiable it is to be so obliging!" observed Lady Caroline, in a sort of soliloquy.

These words caught the ear of Lady Agnes, for which they were principally intended, and at the same time they did not escape that of Lord Estonville.

"Caroline," exclaimed he, "if you have nothing else to do, I wish you would come into the library; I have some papers which I should like you to assist me in looking over." Then turning to Charles, he added, with his former gracious smile, "Captain Mordaunt, I will not take leave of you now. If I am not here when you return from your walk, you will find me either in the library or in my own room."

"Had I not better say that we shall not want our horses yet?" observed Edward to his brother.

"Oh yes; let them remain in the stable till we send for them again. We need not be in haste to get away; we have neither of us anything to do when we arrive at home."

The return of Lady Agnes put a stop to

farther comments; and Charles immediately escorted her to her garden, which was situated at some little distance from the house.

The place where she had formed it, had in fact been originally a stone-quarry, and had furnished the materials with which the old part of the castle had been built; it had afterwards fallen into disuse, and had remained choked up with rubbish until it was cleared out under her superintendence. She had the ground at the bottom of the hollow levelled, and laid out in parterres; and contrived to introduce all sorts of creeping plants into the fissures which had been either naturally or accidentally made in the sides of the rock. Everything she planted grew and flourished; and in a short time the quarry-garden became so pretty under her management, that it was considered one of the favourite lions of the place.

Charles Mordaunt had already visited it several times: and as Lady Agnes now led the way to it, they both became affected with the same sort of awkwardness they had experienced the evening before; long pauses occurred in the conversation, and at length they walked on nearly in silence.

As his companion did not seem inclined to set him the example, Charles began to think it

incumbent upon him to make an effort to speak; and he selected the subject he imagined would prove the most agreeable to her.

"Lady Agnes," he said, "before I see you again, I shall probably spend some weeks at D'Arcy. Is there any message you would wish me to take to Lionel?—any advice you would like me to give him from you?"

"No, thank you," replied her ladyship. "All I have to send my cousin is, my best love and good wishes. My advice I have never attempted to offer him; and if you think he stands in need of counsel at present, I am sure that *you* are much better qualified to afford it him than *I* can be."

Captain Mordaunt sighed deeply as he thought, "there is one piece of counsel I shall certainly give Lionel; and, if he consults his own happiness, he will not hesitate to profit by it as speedily as possible."

Lady Agnes seemed to expect an answer; but, as Charles remained silent, she at last observed,

"Since you will find D'Arcy rather comfortless, I think it is not improbable that you will prevail upon Lionel to leave it, and migrate with you to Mordaunt."

Her companion started, but instantly replied,

"You may rest assured that I have not the least intention of ever proposing such a plan to him." Then, after a short interval of consideration, he added, "I suspect that *I* have been more deeply admitted into some of Lionel's secrets than yourself; and there is one circumstance connected with them which the parties concerned would have no wish to conceal from *you*. I may therefore tell you that my sister and Delmore have arrived at a mutual conviction that it is desirable they should in future see as little of each other as possible."

"They may probably think so now," said Lady Agnes calmly; "but I am inclined to believe they have mistaken their own feelings, and that they are throwing away their happiness."

"You are too generous—too kind!" exclaimed Charles, who was almost thrown off his guard by his admiration of her supposed self-devotion. Then, in a more collected tone, he continued, "I was formerly disposed to be very much of your opinion; but having talked the matter over seriously both with Lionel and with Augusta, and used every argument to persuade them to view it in the same light, it

strikes me as quite out of the question that any renewal of amity should ever take place between them."

"I am extremely sorry to hear this," rejoined Lady Agnes, in a voice which expressed great concern; "and to hear it from such good authority. It has long been the secret, but the warmest wish of my heart, to see Lionel united to your sister."

Charles gazed at her with astonishment. He seemed perfectly electrified by the discovery that had been conveyed to him in these words.

"Is it possible," cried he, "that you have spoken sincerely?"

"It is, indeed," answered Lady Agnes, with a quiet smile. "Yet it is a confession I should scarcely venture to make to every one. You see that I am treating you with the same candour and confidence with which you have behaved towards me."

Her tone and manner bore the stamp of truth. And as the certainty of his mistake became more and more strengthened in his mind, Captain Mordaunt paced up and down the little garden with hasty strides, exclaiming at broken intervals,

"How strangely I have been blinded by my

own misguided fancy! How greatly I have been deceived by the suggestions of others!"

Lady Agnes watched him for some time in silence; but as his agitation did not appear likely to subside, she remarked at length in a voice of remonstrance,

"If I may judge by your expressions, you are at this moment angry with yourself, and still more angry with some other person. I do not feel conscious of having given you any cause of offence, and *I* may therefore request you to be calm and reasonable. But," added she more playfully, "if you have no consideration for *me*, at least take pity upon my poor flowers! You have already trodden down a whole row of pinks."

Charles was recalled to his recollection by this appeal. He stopped short; and surveying the unfortunate plants that lay crushed beneath his feet, exclaimed in an accent of dismay, "Good Heavens! I never suspected the mischief I was doing. Why did you not warn me of it sooner? I know not what excuse to make to you, Lady Agnes, for conduct that is really most unpardonable."

"Then do not make any," said her ladyship, good-humouredly; "and only let what has happened be a warning to you to walk more

carefully the next time you are admitted into a lady's garden. It distresses me to see you look so miserable about those foolish flowers, which do not, I assure you, give *me* the least concern. When the gardener comes, he will rake out the prints of your footsteps, and put everything to rights in five minutes."

"Your kindness," remarked Charles in a subdued voice, "humbles me more deeply than the severest reproaches. There is *much* that I could wish to explain to you,—much that I scarcely yet know how to comprehend; but I dare not trust myself to say more at present,—I must not venture even to hint what has been passing in my thoughts during the last few moments. May I hope that you will forget the folly I have been guilty of to-day? May I flatter myself that I have not forfeited your good opinion; and that you will think of me as you would have done if we had parted yesterday?"

Lady Agnes now became painfully confused, and her voice trembled, as she replied:—

"The opinion I have been inclined to form of your character, both from my own observation, and from what I have heard of you from others, is too firmly grounded to be so easily shaken. But it is growing late, and I must

not keep you longer waiting for your promised *bouquet*."

Charles could devise no excuse for detaining Lady Agnes. The flowers for Augusta were speedily selected and given into his care, and her ladyship left her garden to return to the house. He lingered behind her; and looking back towards the quarry,

"How often," he said, "I shall think of you and of this spot when I am far away! It must be months before I can hope to have the happiness of seeing you again; but, during my absence, I trust that I may sometimes be fortunate enough to hear of you from my sister."

Lady Agnes was too much agitated to make any immediate answer; yet she was probably more vexed than relieved at being joined by Mrs. Mortimer, (the widow of a distant relation of her father's,) who was staying at Estonville. Her inopportune appearance at that instant was a mischievous contrivance of Lady Caroline's, who, when this lady accidentally looked into the library, had whispered in her ear,

"I am sorry that I am too busy to be able to walk with you before luncheon: Agnes is just gone out to her garden, and I am sure she will be delighted to see you there."

It is needless to add that Mrs. Mortimer was rather dismayed, when, instead of finding Lady Agnes alone, she perceived that Captain Mordaunt was with her. Charles, indeed, looked as if her arrival was anything but welcome to him: he bit his lip, and did not seem inclined to utter a single word.

"I had intended," observed Lady Agnes, "to stay out of doors till two o'clock; but it is grown so hot, that I have changed my mind, and I am now going in."

Mrs. Mortimer assented to the warmth of the morning; and then inquired if the curious lily was yet blown, which she had seen coming out into bud two days before?

"I don't believe that it is, but I did not happen to look at it," replied Lady Agnes, who was far from wishing to give any one an opportunity of examining her borders in their present disordered state.

"I must just take a peep at that lily," pursued Mrs. Mortimer. "I will not detain you above a moment, but I really feel a great curiosity to ascertain what sort of flower it will have: I never saw a plant exactly like it before."

She accordingly descended into the garden, and the ill-fated pinks immediately attracted her attention.

"Merciful goodness! Lady Agnes," she suddenly exclaimed, "what barbarian can have done this? Did you discover that all those beautiful pinks and *piccatees*, which the gardener showed us with so much pride, have been entirely destroyed? I never knew anything so abominable and vexatious. I am sure no punishment can be severe enough for the wretch who has wantonly wrought this mischief."

Lady Agnes was half distressed and half amused; and she could not resist looking at Charles with an arch smile, as she attempted to appease the unconscious lady's indignation, by telling her "she had remarked that some of her flowers had been treated rather roughly; but that she believed, when they were tied up again, they would not be much the worse for what they had undergone."

She added that "she suspected she could name the offender, if she chose to do so; but that she did not wish to expose him to public disgrace."

"You have too much charity and forbearance," rejoined Mrs. Mortimer. "I am sure if *I* had received such provocation, I should not be equally disposed to screen the guilty culprit. Whoever he may be, I shall not envy his feelings when he reflects upon his destruc-

tive performance, and still less when he hears of your lenity towards him. I cannot help fearing you are mistaken if you imagine that your favourites will recover. To me they have every appearance of being irretrievably destroyed."

"Can I find no means," thought Lady Agnes, "of silencing my poor silly cousin?" Charles, too, who writhed under her unintentional attacks, was beginning to lose his patience. But just when the case was become apparently hopeless, they were both unexpectedly relieved from all farther persecution.

Perhaps a closer inspection of the scene of outrage had enabled Mrs. Mortimer to discern the impression of a well-shaped boot;—perhaps a new idea had darted spontaneously across her mind; — at any rate, she suddenly discontinued her lamentations, and carefully abstained from again expressing her abhorrence of the person who had occasioned them.

Lady Agnes observed that she surveyed the form and size of Captain Mordaunt's foot with a scrutinizing eye; and she likewise perceived that the mangled remains of one of her pinks, which was still sticking upon his spur, must afford a convincing evidence of the truth of any suspicions her relation might have formed of *his*

having been the offender. She felt altogether extremely uncomfortable; and she anticipated, with no pleasurable sensation, the ridiculous story that would be made out against her if her sister ever happened to hear of the mysterious destruction of her flowers.

"You are tired, I am afraid," said Charles, who had been anxiously watching her uneasiness: "will you not take my arm?"

"Thank you," she replied, as she immediately accepted it. "I have not had anything to fatigue me, but the heat is certainly rather oppressive."

As he was obliged to offer his other arm to her companion, the little conversation that took place afterwards was of course of a very general nature. When they came near the house, Charles descried his groom sauntering about in readiness to receive his summons: he made him a sign to bring the horses to the door, and the man instantly disappeared.

The trio soon reached the steps which led up to the hall: Charles paused when they had mounted them; and as Lady Agnes disengaged her arm from his, he said to her, in a low voice,—

"The dreaded moment is come, and I am compelled to tear myself away from Estonville.

I must not presume to ask you to recollect me occasionally when I am gone. But if it were possible for me to describe to you the pain it gives me to take leave of you, I cannot help feeling a sort of hope that you would now pity me."

Lady Agnes did not speak a word; yet her countenance expressed, as strongly as language could have done, that she participated in the regret at their separation, which he had portrayed with such touching eloquence: she even gently returned the pressure of his hand; and then, half-whispering "God bless you, Captain Mordaunt!" she passed Edward without seeing him, darted up-stairs, shut and locked the door of her own room, and throwing herself into a chair, gave relief to her feelings by a violent flood of tears.

As soon as Lady Agnes was gone, Charles walked hastily into the library, where he found the earl and Lady Caroline still engaged with their papers. Both raised their heads upon his entrance; and the latter, fixing her eyes upon him for an instant, exclaimed, with an affectation of surprise, "Good heavens, Captain Mordaunt, how comical you look! Has anything extraordinary happened? Have you any disagreeable news to communicate!"

Charles was extremely provoked by this attack; yet he answered, with as much coolness as he could command, "that no remarkable event had to his knowledge occurred since he last saw her; and that, if he appeared a little more melancholy than usual, the circumstance might be easily accounted for, if she only recollected that he was upon the point of bidding adieu to her ladyship for a period of indefinite duration."

"Very true," observed Lady Caroline; "I did not think of the distressing prospect of your departure, or I had somehow fancied you had postponed it. In short, I had made a jumble in my mind about it altogether; but I now understand it very clearly. It is a pity you are obliged to go away! I am not in the practice of weeping when I part with my friends, so you must excuse me if I do not shed tears upon the present affecting occasion. I may, however, with sincerity assure you, that your absence will be deeply regretted by more members of the Estonville family than myself."

"I wish, Caroline," observed her father, sternly, "that you would attend to my concerns instead of talking nonsense. You know how anxious I am to despatch these papers."

Then turning to Charles, and shaking hands with him very graciously, he said,

"I am indeed truly sorry to lose your company, Captain Mordaunt. I hope, whenever you return to this neighbourhood, that we shall have the pleasure of seeing you again."

When Lady Agnes Mortimer came down to luncheon, all traces of emotion had passed away from her countenance; she was perhaps a little paler than usual, but no other difference was discernible either in her appearance or in her manner; and her sister was both puzzled and angry with her for her composure.

"Did you join Agnes out walking this morning?" inquired she, addressing herself to Mrs. Mortimer.

"Yes; I met her just as she was leaving her garden," was the only answer she could extract.

The truth was, Mrs. Mortimer disliked and feared Lady Caroline; she was angry with her for having employed her as a spy upon her sister; and she determined not to gratify her curiosity by telling her how unwelcome her presence had proved to Captain Mordaunt, or to amuse her by describing the unfortunate scrape she had unwittingly fallen into.

The instant Charles Mordaunt left Eston-

ville Castle, he put his horse into a gallop; he was little inclined to enter into conversation, and if Edward's remonstrances had not occasionally checked his speed, he would probably never have drawn bridle until he reached home. Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt observed that he appeared much excited; and the former suspected that, in spite of all his son's original declarations of insensibility towards Lady Caroline Mortimer, he could perceive strong indications of his having at length felt the fascinating influence of her charms. It was not until after Charles's departure, that he discovered from Edward's hints who had been the real object of his attraction at Estonville.

As soon as his mother and sister left the dining-room on the day that Charles returned home, Mr. Mordaunt exclaimed,

"I must not forget that I have a story to tell you of your friend Mrs. Porter. I have had a visit from her husband during your absence, and I am sorry to inform you, that, much as you might flatter yourself you had made a conquest of the fair lady the morning she called here, I have great reason to apprehend you were discarded from her favour when she found out that you had treacherously ren-

dered yourself agreeable to her under a fictitious character."

Mr. Mordaunt then proceeded to relate that Mrs. Porter had gone back from Mordaunt in high spirits, fully persuaded that she had seen the bridegroom, and much delighted with the civility she had received from him. She had talked of nothing else during the whole of dinner-time; had praised him to her spouse in the most glowing terms, and declared that, with such a husband, it would be quite impossible that Miss Mordaunt should not be a very happy woman.

A visit of congratulation at Mordaunt Park was too important an event to be kept a secret; it would have been selfish not to have extended her description of it beyond the narrow limits of her own family circle, and Mrs. Porter was too kindly disposed to be guilty of that sort of selfishness. She was engaged to drink tea with a friend; so she left all her boasted domestic concerns to take care of themselves, and sallied forth very early, with a determination of just calling in upon one or two of her neighbours in her way to her party.

At each place she opened the conversation by observing,—

"I have been so long away, that I really could not pass your door without stopping to say, How do you do? I am on my road to Mrs. Rattle's, and I have not an instant to stay with you."

In spite of her pretended hurry, she then sat down for at least half-an-hour's gossip. She pleaded fatigue in consequence of her long ride. "She had been over," she remarked, "to Mordaunt Park in the morning." She regretted that she had not been fortunate enough to see the ladies; but she described what a nice affable young gentleman Mr. Stafford was, and hinted with conscious importance how remarkably polite he had been to *her*.

Her auditors stared, and told her it was generally reported that Mr. Stafford's marriage was entirely broken off, and that it was a well-known fact he had left Mordaunt.

Mrs. Porter was extremely indignant at not being believed, and discredited the whole of the information that was given her by her neighbours. She fancied they were jealous of her knowing more about the family at Mordaunt than themselves, and that they only said these things to vex her.

"It is not likely," she observed pettishly, "that I should place greater faith in your

assertions than in the evidence of my own senses. 'Seeing is believing,' as the old saying goes. I repeat, that I saw Mr. Stafford this morning with my own eyes; that I wished him joy; and that he promised to come and call upon me the first time that he and his lady return to this part of the country after their wedding. When you hear all this, pray which do you think is most probably the right story, —yours or mine?"

Such arguments staggered the confidence of some of her hearers, and they began to imagine that, though Miss Mordaunt and her intended husband had certainly had a quarrel, it was by no means impossible that they might have made it up again.

When Mrs. Porter arrived at Mrs. Rattle's, instead of contending with her antagonists singly, she found herself opposed to a host of disputants. She maintained her part extremely well, and returned home with triumphant feelings, to boast to her husband of not having allowed herself to be brow-beaten.

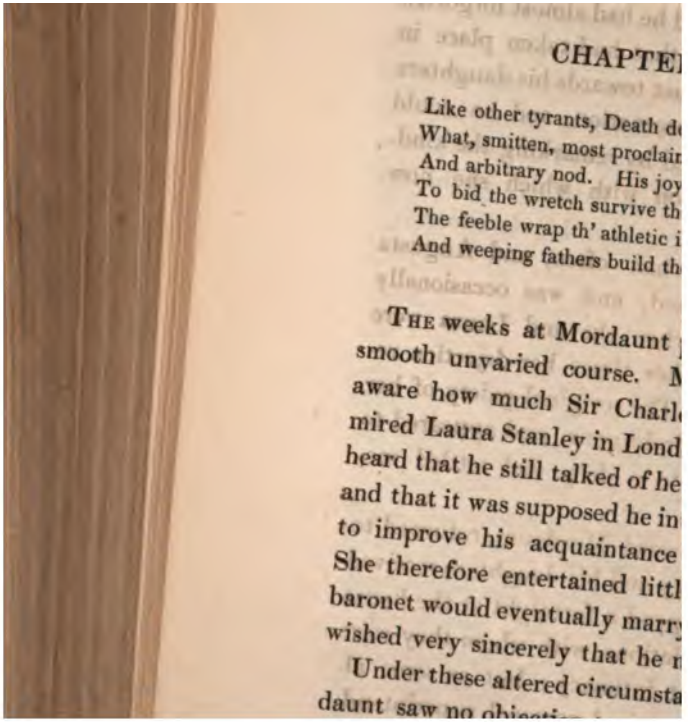
Her exultation, however, was very short-lived. The next morning Mr. Porter announced to her, that he had learned from unquestionable authority that the match at Mordaunt was really at an end. "The gentle-

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over to Mordaunt and explain the case ; which he accordingly did, with a considerable degree of dry humour.

Mr. Mordaunt himself knew how to tell a history of this kind to the best advantage ; and Charles was excessively entertained with the sequel of an adventure, the commencement of which he had found sufficiently ludicrous. At the same time, he was concerned at the vexation he had occasioned Mrs. Porter ; and he felt really sorry to have incurred her displeasure.



CHAPTE

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moved, she imagined that Laura Stanley might prove a very eligible companion for Miss Mordaunt.

Dr. Stanley had learned nothing of Sir Charles Parker—indeed he had almost forgotten him; but the change that had taken place in Mrs. Mordaunt's conduct towards his daughters did not escape his observation, and he could not help feeling pleased by remarking the kindness and consideration with which she now treated them.

The two families met often, and Augusta always seemed pleased, and was occasionally tolerably cheerful, when she and Laura were together; but at other times her dejection remained unabated. The original gaiety of her disposition was entirely gone, and appeared to have given place to a deep and settled melancholy.

Just before Edward Mordaunt returned to Oxford, Dr. Stanley and his daughters received an invitation to spend a fortnight at the house of one of their relations, with whom they were in habits of great intimacy; but as some alterations which required personal superintendence were going forward at Mordaunt, it was not possible for them to leave home.

Miss Stanley accidentally mentioned this

circumstance to Mrs. Mordaunt, and regretted that her father was obliged to decline an engagement which would have been agreeable to them all, and more particularly to Laura.

"It is indeed a pity that your sister should be disappointed," replied Mrs. Mordaunt. "Can you not manage this visit for her in any way?"

Then, after a few minutes' consideration, she added,—"There is one plan which suggests itself to my mind. As you do not seem extremely anxious about the party upon your own account, why should you not persuade Dr. Stanley and Laura to go without you, and remain here with me during their absence? I need not say, that I should be delighted to have the pleasure of your company; and you might go over every morning, if it was necessary, to inspect the improvements at the Rectory."

Miss Stanley thanked Mrs. Mordaunt for her kindness, but begged to consult her father before she agreed to avail herself of it.

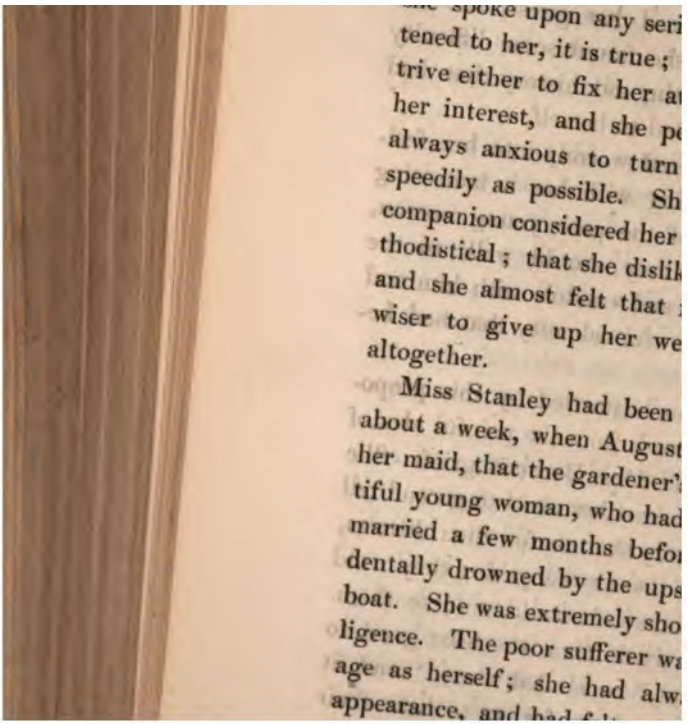
The result of their deliberation was a decision to adopt the arrangement that had been thus proposed to them; but when this was communicated to Laura, it appeared to give her less satisfaction than they had expected.

It has been already hinted that Miss Stanley

was not exactly the sort of person who would have been selected by Mrs. Mordaunt as a companion: she admired her good sense and respected her worth, yet she could not learn to think her agreeable; and when she arrived at Mordaunt, she contrived to depute her daughter to entertain her during the greatest part of every morning.

Miss Stanley had always felt much interest in Augusta, and had regretted the mistaken kind of education she had received: it now went to her heart to remark her deep dejection, and to see her, regardless of all the comforts and blessings by which she was surrounded, hopelessly pining away her existence because she had met with a disappointment in a love-affair.

She knew that it would be both vain and impertinent in her to attempt to reason with Miss Mordaunt upon such a subject; but she thought that by endeavouring to instil religious principles into her mind, and by leading her indirectly to reflect in a manner she had never been taught to do before, she might induce her to take a more rational and proper view of her own situation, and assist her to understand those duties which she scarcely appeared to be aware were even required of her.


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class of life with whom she was well acquainted; the blunt originality of her remarks surprised and diverted her, and she much liked to hear her talk.

When Augusta joined her guest, she was much agitated; and she found some difficulty in repeating to her the sad history that had just been communicated to herself.

Miss Stanley entered warmly into her feelings, and after uniting with her in lamenting the untimely fate of the poor young woman, she proposed that they should walk to the gardener's cottage, and condole with him and his wife upon the awful calamity that had befallen them.

Augusta was much startled by this proposition, and she shrunk from the painful idea of witnessing Mr. and Mrs. Barker's grief. She said, "she had desired her maid to go and tell them how very sorry she was for their distress, and to ask them if there was anything they could possibly think of that *she* could send to them. It could not surely do *them* the least good to see us at present," concluded she; "and it would be very shocking for *us* to hear their heart-broken lamentations."

"It would be grievous, undoubtedly," replied Miss Stanley: "and I agree with you that

their affliction is yet too recent to admit of much alleviation. But I am not sure that it might not be in our power to be of some use to them: at any rate, I am convinced they would feel much more gratified by your inquiring after them in person, than by the kindest message you could send them by any one else."

Augusta made no farther objection to accompany Miss Stanley to the gardener's abode; but when they came within sight of it, she turned extremely pale, and a sort of nervous tremor came over her.

They found Barker himself sitting absorbed in his grief: he rose mechanically when the ladies entered, but he seemed unable to speak to them, and after gazing wildly at them for a moment, he gave way to a violent burst of feeling. Augusta was very much overcome, and Miss Stanley almost repented having brought her into so affecting a scene.

As soon as Barker had in some degree recovered his composure, he apologised to his guests for the reception he had given them. He said that his wife's grief was so excessive that they could not persuade her to come downstairs; but that one of her neighbours had kindly offered to sit with her.

"I cannot ask you, ladies," observed he,

"to go up into her room to-day; she is not really, poor thing! in a fit state to receive you. I trust by to-morrow she will be quieter; and then, if you are good enough to walk this way again, I think it will be a comfort to her to see you."

Miss Stanley looked at Augusta, who immediately promised to visit Mrs. Barker the following morning, adding a hope that she should then find her better.

After Miss Mordaunt returned home, she could think and talk of nothing but the gardener and his family.

"I am not sure," observed her mother, "that I quite like your going to these sort of places. At your age, the sight of actual wretchedness is apt to leave too deep an impression upon the mind, and to work the feelings unnecessarily. However, since you have told poor Barker that you will see his wife to-morrow, I shall certainly wish you to keep your word."

Miss Stanley immediately took the whole blame of the proceeding—if blame there was—upon herself, and said she was extremely sorry she had induced Miss Mordaunt to do what she was afraid had not met with her mother's approbation.

Mrs. Mordaunt candidly replied, "that had

she been consulted beforehand, she should have advised Augusta's deferring her visit to the Barkers; but that, as she had once seen them, there could be no objection to her repeating it." She said she much admired the kindness which had led Miss Stanley to endeavour to give them consolation; and she assured her, "that although she might differ from her in her ideas upon some immaterial points, she felt a perfect confidence that when her daughter was with *her*, she never could do anything that would incur her disapprobation, or occasion her to experience the slightest uneasiness."

The young ladies found the gardener again alone the following morning.

"I am just come in from my work," said he: "I cannot stand it yet—though I have nothing but wretchedness to return to here."

Augusta inquired after his wife.

"She gets worse and worse, miss," replied he in a melancholy tone. "She fretted all the night through, and I am afraid she will make herself quite ill at last. I think her head is beginning to be a little confused already,—at least she wanders strangely in her talk. I tell her that it is wicked and unchristian to take on in the manner she does; but I cannot pacify

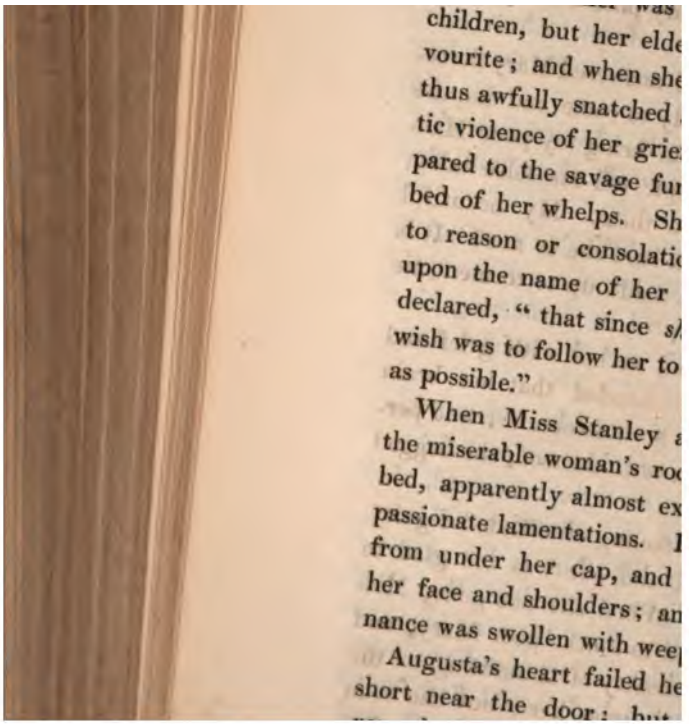
her in any way. I wish, Miss Stanley, that *you* would go and speak to her: perhaps she would attend to what *you* say."

"I will go to her directly," answered Miss Stanley: "but since she refuses to hear your arguments, I can scarcely hope to persuade her to listen to mine."

Then turning to Augusta, she recommended her, in a lower voice, to walk about until she came back to her.

Miss Mordaunt suspected that her companion thought her deficient in firmness and strength of mind; she was piqued at considering herself treated like a child, and she insisted upon seeing Mrs. Barker.

Mary Barker was a sensible woman; her feelings were strong and her temper violent. As far as worldly matters were concerned, she had received as good an education as most people in her rank in life; but as her parents had no sense of religion themselves, they did not think it incumbent upon them to impress any upon their children. Mary was frequently heard to say, "that nobody could find fault with her conduct; and that she did not see why she was not quite as good as those who made a fuss about going to church every Sab-



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"Who is it that speaks to me?" said Mary Barker, gazing wildly at her visitor without seeming to recognize her.

"It is Miss Stanley, my poor woman! Do you not recollect me?"

"I recollect nobody!" answered Mary fiercely; "and I want nobody to come and inquire after me, unless they can bring my poor Hannah home to me. People tell me false tales; but I will not believe them. My beautiful child is *not* dead—I am sure she is not! It is all a wicked invention, made up to torment me and drive me mad."

Miss Stanley looked at her with grief and compassion; she apprehended that her brain was really affected by her misfortune; and perceiving that Augusta was alarmed, she begged her to go down-stairs.

Miss Mordaunt's feeling of offended dignity was now forgotten, and she was too glad to make her escape. When she was gone, Miss Stanley endeavoured to soothe poor Mary, and to show her the necessity of submitting to the trial that had come upon her; but she soon became convinced that she was wasting her time and her eloquence to little purpose, and she was preparing to quit the cottage, when one of the village neighbours made her ap-

pearance. This woman was well known to Miss Stanley, who immediately explained to her the state of things up-stairs.

"This will never do, Mrs. Thompson," concluded she; "you must attempt to prevail upon Mary to get up and come down-stairs. We will look in again as we return from our walk, to see how you are going on."

"Do you think," inquired Miss Mordaunt in an agitated voice when they left the cottage, "that Mrs. Barker is really out of her mind?"

"No, I hope not," replied Miss Stanley. "She has given way to her affliction till her paroxysms of grief have bewildered her head; but the more ungovernable her feelings are at first, the sooner they will probably exhaust themselves. I have often been told that Mary Barker was an unbeliever; and, from what I have now seen and heard, I am much inclined to suppose that this is too true."

Augusta was too deeply interested in the scene she had just witnessed to speak much herself; her attention became riveted upon her companion's remarks; and she now discovered her own ignorance upon subjects that began to appear to her of the greatest importance, and

she longed to obtain clearer instruction about them.

Before the ladies stopped a second time at the gardener's cottage, Mrs. Barker had become more tranquil: she had allowed herself to be dressed, and she was sitting before the fire in the room down-stairs, but bent so nearly double that her head almost rested upon her knees.

Miss Stanley looked towards a shelf where Barker had placed a few books, and perceiving a little manual of devotion which her father had once given him, she said to Mrs. Thompson,

"I think it would prove a comfort to poor Mary if you or her husband were to read to her a little. Parts of that book were written expressly for persons in her distressed situation."

Mrs. Thompson shook her head as she replied,

"It is indeed a sad pity that she cannot be persuaded to seek that sort of consolation; I have been telling her so while you were away. But in prosperous times I am afraid she never has been in the habit of saying her prayers, and I really believe that she does not know how to set about doing it now."

Miss Stanley sighed; and Barker, who was not so great a heathen as his wife, requested her to be kind enough to point out to him those pages in the book which she considered particularly applicable to his present case. Mrs. Barker had all this time been moaning and sobbing most piteously.

"I wish," pursued Miss Stanley, "that your wife would let me read some of these passages to her before I go." Then addressing herself more directly to Mary, she added, "You would, I think, have no objection to hear me."

The miserable woman raised her head, and replied very ungraciously, "You may read anything you please; but I have no desire to hear it, and I shall not attend to you."

Her husband was shocked at her rudeness.

"You must excuse her, Miss Stanley," he said; "for she is so beside herself, that she really is not aware of what she speaks."

Miss Stanley assured him she was not offended; and placing herself close beside his distracted wife, she began to read in a clear impressive voice.

At first Mary Barker threw herself impatiently about in her chair, and seemed very much disposed to stop her ears; but by degrees she grew quieter and more respectful in her

behaviour—she even appeared to be attending to Miss Stanley's words; and at last she actually slipped down upon her knees, and, clasping her hands together, joined silently but fervently in the prayer that she had been inclined to reject with so much indignation and contempt. After her visitor had closed the book, she remained kneeling for some moments; and when she rose from the ground, it was in an altered and a humbled voice that she exclaimed,

"Those words seem as if they had been put together on purpose for *me;* they tell me exactly everything that I feel; I could listen to them for ever:—Oh, Miss Stanley! when will you come and read them to me again?"

"I will read to you to-morrow as much as you like; and in the mean while you can look over what you have now heard, if you feel disposed to do so."

Mrs. Barker took the volume from her hand, and laid it upon the table near her. As Miss Stanley and Augusta were departing, the gardener followed them to the door.

"You have done wonders with my poor wife," observed he to the former, "and I know not how to thank you for it as I ought to do."

"Her heart is at length softened, poor thing!" answered Miss Stanley, "and I hope that the

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much gratified by the encouragement she received from her.

The next day they found Mary Barker in a much more rational frame of mind; she listened eagerly to what was read to her, and paid great attention to all Miss Stanley's instructions: her natural good sense and acuteness enabled her to understand at once whatever was explained to her; and before many weeks had elapsed, she became—as her husband expressed it—'a new woman.' She was indeed broken in heart, and subdued in spirit; yet she strove to bear up against her grief. She was never heard to repine at the loss of her daughter; she always said, "that she believed she had been taken from her as a punishment for her former wickedness." She grew more gentle and forbearing in her behaviour; and, in short, she was now as exemplary in the observance of her religious duties, as she had originally been remarkable for her neglect of them.

Nor was the change that had been effected in Miss Mordaunt's character less important, though it might be less apparent, than that which had been wrought in Mary Barker's. Miss Stanley had proved an invaluable friend to her also; she had implanted and firmly

established in her mind the only thing which she had before required to render her permanently amiable—a deep and sincere feeling of religious principle.

Augusta's conduct was of course immediately influenced by the new turn which had been given to her ideas. Instead of encouraging despondency, she sought amusement in cultivating her different accomplishments; while she devoted a portion of her time to instructive reading. She went constantly to see Mary Barker, and she tried to become really useful to all the poor people around her.

Mrs. Mordaunt had at first been rather inclined to dislike the ascendency which Miss Stanley was gaining over her daughter; she was afraid that she was trying to make her what she termed '*too righteous.*' But when she found that, instead of growing more serious, Augusta's countenance resumed its former cheerfulness, and that her melancholy was wearing away, she changed her opinion, and began to regard her intimacy with her new friend as a very fortunate circumstance.

Augusta had never mentioned her love affairs to Miss Stanley; yet, while she acknowledged to herself with sincere regret that she had used Mr. Stafford extremely ill, she rejoiced more

thankfully than ever that she had escaped a union which could have been attended with nothing but misery. She tried in vain to forget Lord Delmore: he frequently presented himself to her thoughts as an object of interest and of pity; and she hoped that his last misfortune would be a more effectual warning to him to avoid the gaming-table in future, than all his former reverses had proved.

Dr. Stanley's absence from home was extended from a fortnight to three weeks, and of course his daughter remained at Mordaunt Park during the whole of that time. When the day of her departure arrived, she and Augusta took leave of each other with feelings of mutual regret, though they were only to be separated by the distance of a walk.

Mrs. Mordaunt was particularly gracious in her farewell to her guest. She thanked her for the pleasure her company had afforded her, and spoke very warmly of her obligation to her for her kindness to her daughter: adding, "that since *she* had been with them, the improvement in Augusta's spirits was quite remarkable; and that both Mr. Mordaunt and herself attributed this happy change entirely to *her* cheering society and excellent counsel."

CHAPTER VIII.

Surprised was the laird when the leddy said na,
And wi' a laigh curtsey she turned her awa.
Laird of Cockpen.

Laura Stanley was both surprised and gratified by receiving a visit from the Mordaunts the very morning after her return home.

"Augusta expressed so ardent a desire to see you," said Mrs. Mordaunt, "that she would not agree to defer her drive to the Rectory even for one day."

Yet, had not the mother had a purpose of her own in granting this request, it is probable that the daughter's impatience might not have been so soon attended to.

Mrs. Mordaunt was aware that Sir Charles Parker had been staying in the same house with the Stanleys the whole time of their absence; Miss Stanley had admitted to her that he had shown her sister great attention, and she was now extremely anxious to learn if the plot had thickened satisfactorily at last, and to

hear exactly under what circumstances the supposed lovers had parted.

She endeavoured to bring the conversation round to the subject upon which she wished to be informed; but Miss Stanley was not a person to fall into that sort of snare; and she found that, if she expected to persuade her to gratify her curiosity, she must condescend to ask her more explicitly to do so.

Accordingly, when Augusta and Laura were out of hearing, she remarked, "that the traveller had returned home in very great beauty."

"Yes," answered Miss Stanley, "I never saw her in better looks than she is at present."

"As you have made me no communication," pursued her visitor, "I conclude it would be premature to congratulate you; but I shall expect very soon to hear that a certain young baronet has arrived at Mordaunt."

"I believe," said Miss Stanley, without pretending not to comprehend Mrs. Mordaunt's meaning, "that the person to whom you allude is not at all likely to come this way. I am told he is going immediately into Leicestershire, and that it is his intention to spend the winter there."

"What! has he been carrying on a flirta-

tion with your sister all this time, without purposing to follow it up by anything more serious? Forgive me, if I hint to you that this ought not to be allowed."

"I was far from intending to insinuate," replied Miss Stanley calmly, "that Sir Charles Parker had behaved dishonourably: on the contrary, my father seems to have a very high opinion of him."

"And what does Laura say of him?"

"She speaks of him very little; but whenever she does mention him, it is in terms of commendation."

Mrs. Mordaunt perceived, from the guarded nature of Miss Stanley's answers, that she was either unwilling or unable to let her into the secrets of the case; she therefore forbore, with mingled good sense and good breeding, to press her farther upon the subject.

She scanned Laura's manner with a scrutinizing eye, and thought that she had very little the air of a damsel well satisfied with the object of her choice, and still less of a happy promise.

In a few days Mrs. Mordaunt received the unwelcome tidings of its being credibly reported that Sir Charles Parker had been refused by a daughter of the clergyman of Mordaunt,

and of his having gone to Melton in a state of despair and indignation.

"What bad news have you found in that letter, which you have been pondering over for the last five minutes?" asked Mr. Mordaunt.

"The intelligence it contains is disagreeable enough," replied his lady: "it seems that Laura Stanley has rejected Sir Charles Parker."

"I never was disposed to give young ladies credit for great wisdom," he remarked, in an ironical tone; "and from what I have heard and seen of them lately, I am inclined to think they are perfect fools;—wrong-headed, provoking fools! Little Miss Laura Stanley's behaviour in turning up her nose at such an offer, is scarcely short of positive insanity. Augusta's conduct was unpardonable enough, yet it was nothing compared to this—not half so silly or impertinent."

"I am afraid," pursued Mrs. Mordaunt, "that this poor foolish girl will prove a thorn in our side. I wish with all my heart that she had accepted Sir Charles."

"Nobody can deny that that is a very kind wish. I see the cause of your anxiety; you apprehend that Edward is disposed to fall in love with our pretty neighbour; and, upon my word, it is paying your son a high compliment,

to suppose that a young lady who has despised such a *parti* as Sir Charles will condescend to look favourably upon a second brother."

"It is impossible," answered Mrs. Mordaunt, "to argue upon romantic fancies. I am sure she likes Edward; and it would be a wretched thing for him if he took it into his head to marry her."

"I am not certain that I am exactly of the same opinion, though I am far from desiring the alliance. Should worthy Dr. Stanley happen to be removed from this world, Edward would come into possession of a very good living; and if he thought proper to take to himself the doctor's daughter, as well as to succeed to his preferment, I see no reasonable objection we could have to his doing so. When we resolved to put him into the Church, of course we made up our minds to see him become nothing more nor less than a country clergyman: as such, an extravagant fine lady would make him a very unsuitable wife. Laura Stanley has been well brought up; and has, moreover, been accustomed to the sort of life she would hereafter lead as Mrs. Edward Mordaunt. Charles seems inclined to be more aspiring in his matrimonial projects than his brother; and as he is the elder born,

that is quite as it ought to be. I confess, he might have selected a love with more spirit and animation than Lady Agnes Mortimer; but the connexion with the Estonville family would be an excellent one; and, all circumstances considered, I scarcely know any other that I should regard as equally desirable."

Mrs. Mordaunt perceived the good sense of all that her husband had advanced, and she did not attempt to controvert his arguments, though they were far from being in concurrence with her own ideas.

"Charles and Edward, it seems," thought she, "will find their wishes comfortably sanctioned by their father. There is no accounting for taste,—or rather, everybody's taste is different. Few people, I believe, are really fond of their daughters-in-law; therefore, if I cannot bring myself exactly to like mine, my misfortune will not be a singular one."

Mr. Mordaunt's indulgent views respecting his sons may appear rather unnatural in so selfish and worldly-minded a person; yet he had not determined to favour their matrimonial plans without feeling convinced that it would be for his advantage as well as for theirs to do so. He had foreseen that they might soon think of marrying, and he had apprehended

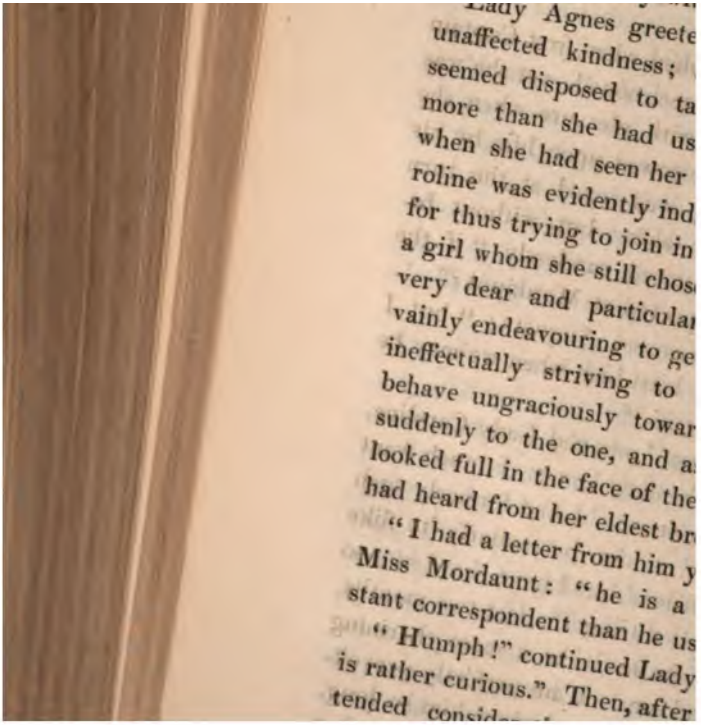
that they might fix their affections imprudently. He knew that Charles would scorn the sensible idea of looking out for an heiress, and, he feared, would too probably fall in love with somebody without a shilling; he was therefore well contented when he discovered his growing passion for Lady Agnes Mortimer. He did not admire Lady Agnes himself; yet she was amiable, and pretty, and her birth rendered her an eligible match for any person. Lord Estonville would give her a handsome portion; and she was so domestic in her tastes, that she would be very unlikely to lead her husband into habits of extravagance.

As for Edward, Mr. Mordaunt thought he would be very comfortably provided for whenever he became rector of Mordaunt; and he wished him to be aware that he had little more to expect from *him*. His sentiments upon the subject of his supposed preference for Laura Stanley have been already explained. The circumstance, too, of her having refused Sir Charles Parker, now rather enhanced her in Mr. Mordaunt's estimation; and even while he accused her of folly in despising the advantages of fortune, he decided internally that that very folly rendered her peculiarly desirable as a daughter-in-law.

Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt had been asked to go and stay at Estonville soon after Charles's departure to join his regiment; but Augusta was then in such bad spirits, that her mother disliked the idea of her being seen by strangers, and more particularly by Lady Caroline Mortimer; and the invitation was consequently not accepted. It was now repeated; and as the same reason for declining it no longer existed, Mr. Mordaunt declared "that it would be both a right and an agreeable thing to go and keep up their acquaintance with their excellent neighbours."

Several morning visits had been exchanged between the ladies of the two families, yet Augusta had not seen Lady Caroline Mortimer since the day she brought her guests to call at Mordaunt. She was much afraid of meeting her; and it would be hard to say if she felt most surprised, relieved, or disgusted, when her ladyship received her with all her former warmth of manner, overwhelmed her with expressions of affection, and treated her with a sort of compassionate tenderness which was quite provoking.

Augusta had resolved to show her that she could no longer be imposed upon by her artifices; but she had also made a wise determi-


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foolish enough to be afraid of Charles; but I have now learned to love and value him as he deserves, and I can never again feel any *apprehension* of him."

Lady Agnes had blushed when first Captain Mordaunt's name was mentioned, yet she was not ashamed to smile with pleasure when she heard the eulogium bestowed upon him by his sister. Lady Caroline was vexed at the turn the conversation had taken; but, without betraying this, she inquired carelessly "if the Captain was soon expected at Mordaunt?"

"I fear not," answered Augusta: "but I really have not the least idea when we may be likely to see him again."

"I am very sorry," pursued Lady Caroline, "that he is not coming home: I much want to meet him once more. I had formerly such deplorable taste as not particularly to like your brother Charles; but I have heard him so constantly praised during the last two months, that I am sure he must be a most charming and estimable person. I am perfectly provoked with myself for having known him so long, without having had the wit to find out what others in this house discovered, I believe, the very first time they saw him."

This attack was too personal to be misunder-

stood. Lady Agnes had hitherto affected not to perceive that her sister's observations were intended to apply to *her;* she now rose, gave Lady Caroline one look of calm, indignant contempt, and walked away to the other side of the room.

Lady Caroline's eye sunk beneath her glance; yet she instantly endeavoured to laugh off her confusion.

"I did not think," she said, "that my gentle sister Agnes could have put on such a haughty air of defiance; did you, Augusta? Upon my word, I believe she might be able to act the part of a tragedy queen very creditably."

Then in a different tone she added—"Speaking more seriously, I am glad that I have driven her away at last. I had no idea of allowing her to stick herself into your pocket all night, merely because she wishes you to tell your brother the next time you write to him what a delightful creature you consider Lady Agnes Mortimer. Depend upon it, her present kind attentions to *you* spring entirely from her reflected affection for *him:* you may recollect that she was not so fond of you before she was acquainted with Captain Mordaunt."

Augusta had been much shocked by Lady Caroline's ill-nature to her sister; and she was

now little inclined to smile at her spiteful wit, or to applaud her malicious remarks.

"I am afraid," she replied gravely, "that it was my own fault if Lady Agnes disliked me when first I knew her; I shall therefore feel extremely obliged to her if she is willing to forget my past conduct."

Lady Caroline fixed her eyes keenly upon Miss Mordaunt for a minute or two.

"I had heard," she observed, "that Miss Stanley had made a Methodist of you; but I fancied that *you* were not a sort of person to become ridiculously over-righteous. I find, however, that I have been mistaken in my estimate of your character; and I have so much regard for you, that I am sorry for it. It is evident enough that the *good fit* is strongly upon you just now;—you need not attempt to deny it: yet I flatter myself that it is far too violent to prove lasting."

The colour rose indignantly to Augusta's cheek; but she struggled to command her feelings, as she answered,—

"I well remember your warning me long ago that our neighbours were Methodists. I did not at that time know anything about their religious principles, but I can now positively assure you that they are strictly orthodox."

She paused, and then continued in a calmer voice,—"I have met with few people so truly good as Miss Stanley. I owe a great deal to her kindness, and I cannot bear to hear her spoken of reproachfully. I care not, Lady Caroline, how much you may amuse yourself at *my* expense—I am very willing to listen to you while you laugh at *me;* but it really gives me pain when you attempt to turn my friend into ridicule."

"You are grown extremely chivalrous, my dear," exclaimed her ladyship, with an evident alteration of manner; "and although I cannot exactly enter into your sentiments, I know how to respect the good feeling you have expressed; and I will promise you never again to talk slightingly of Miss Stanley in your hearing. But, before we take leave of the Stanleys, do tell me, Augusta, whether it is actually true that Miss Laura refused our friend Sir Charles Parker. The story has been published by various authorities; but it appears so *very* extraordinary, that I can scarcely bring myself to believe it."

"Had anything relating to this affair," replied Augusta, "been communicated to me in confidence, I should of course have felt bound to conceal it. All I can say is, that I know

Sir Charles was supposed to be much in love with Laura, by those who saw them together lately: and I may add, that when I heard the report of his having proposed to her, *I* entertained no doubt of its being a correct one."

"A very guarded, diplomatic answer," thought Lady Caroline. "It is strange," she remarked aloud, "that *you* somehow possess the art of always bringing me over to your opinion. As you have persuaded me of the authenticity of one report concerning Miss Laura Stanley, I imagine I may conclude that the other rumour relating to her is equally well founded."

"I have never happened to hear any other rumour."

"Your innocent, unsuspecting face is too diverting," pursued her ladyship. "You certainly do know how to keep a secret most admirably;" (Augusta reddened;) "but yet you cannot altogether deceive *me*. I am well aware that it could not be possible for your brother Edward and your friend to carry on a quiet little flirtation under your very eyes, without your perceiving what was going forward. I will not distress you by asking you any more questions, since I see that you are not at liberty

to satisfy my curiosity. My conjectures are now confirmed; and I may surely content myself with having first ascertained the certainty that Sir Charles did propose, and, secondly, with having solved the puzzling enigma of the baronet's rejection."

Augusta was excessively vexed at being subjected to these sort of interrogations, and still more provoked at Lady Caroline's assuming a knowledge of her family secrets. She felt much tempted to dispute having given the slightest sanction to the suppositions she had been pleased to advance; but a moment's reflection convinced her that this would be only playing her tormentor's game. It had, in fact, been her ladyship's wish to goad her on to enter into a discussion, and she was mortified at finding her curiosity baffled by her determined silence. It would have been an additional vexation to her haughty spirit to permit Augusta to suspect she had foiled her; she therefore continued the conversation in her usual lively style, and talked upon various subjects with great animation.

It was a relief both to Lady Caroline and to Miss Mordaunt, when their *tête-à-tête* was at last broken in upon by some of the gentlemen. As soon as her companion became engaged in

deep discourse with two of her London flirts, Augusta took the opportunity of making her escape, and of joining Lady Agnes.

"She has actually deserted me — gone over to the opposite party!" said Lady Caroline, when Miss Mordaunt was out of hearing. "Ungrateful girl! I have not deserved such treatment from her! And yet she *was* such a charming creature, and she *is* still so beautiful, that I can scarcely find in my heart to feel angry with her."

"I cannot pretend to decide what degree of blame Miss Mordaunt may deserve," remarked one of the young men, for whose edification these words had been spoken, "until I understand the nature of the offence she has committed against you."

"Her temper has been a little soured, poor thing! by her recent disappointment," replied her ladyship; "she ought to be pitied for that misfortune. But, what is still worse, she is grown a shocking Methodist. She was quite scandalized by my wicked observations to-night: with the strait-laced, puritanical ideas she has unluckily acquired, I cannot imagine how she will ever again be able to accommodate herself to the sinful practices of unsaintly London society."

"Oh, do not fear that," continued the other gentleman. "Depend upon it, she will have forgotten her faithless lover, and have become tired of her sanctity, long before she goes to town. You must have heard the old saying, (it is not a very elegant one to quote to a lady,) which tells us, that

'When the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be;
But when the devil got well, the devil a monk was he.'"

"That adage is certainly not new to me," answered Lady Caroline, laughing; "and there is no disputing that it may be well applied to the case we are considering. My conscience will not allow me to add, however, that you have displayed much gallantry in comparing poor dear Augusta to so ugly and shocking a prototype as his Satanic Majesty."

In this manner did her ladyship divert herself and her father's guests by quizzing and depreciating her former *favourite*, until she grew weary of the subject, and consequently changed it for some other.

In the mean time, Lady Agnes and Augusta, feeling now mutually disposed to be pleased with each other, very soon forgot that they had not originally considered themselves kindred spirits. They were talking very comfortably, when they happened at the same instant to

direct their eyes towards the party at the other end of the room, who were evidently watching them, and, as they truly suspected, exercising their wit at their expense. Both became silent; and after considering for a few moments, Lady Agnes said,

"As Caroline is my sister, you may think the hint I am going to give you rather strange; but I assure you it is kindly intended. It has struck me this evening, that you and she are not upon such friendly terms as you formerly were. I do not wish to inquire the cause of this change; I have no doubt her caprice has afforded you provocation; but let me recommend you upon no account to quarrel with her. Those who live much with her must submit to her impertinence; for nothing but vexation and defeat is to be gained by opposing it. She has always declared that she was charmed with *you* the first instant she saw you—that was perhaps not very extraordinary. You continued to be her favoured, flattered friend for more than a year—which was, I confess, rather more wonderful, as she is a little apt to tire of her dearest associates. When this happens, it is not her practice to give them up,—they merely experience a diminution of her affection. It will, therefore, be extremely easy for you at

present to maintain a semblance of amity with her.

"It is one of Caroline's maxims, 'that there is nothing so foolish as feuds between friends.' 'It is *her* principle,' she says, 'to be upon civil terms with everybody; but if any person is wrong-headed enough to insist upon driving her to extremity, she can then act a Spaniard's part, and declare *war to the knife*.'"

Augusta thanked Lady Agnes very gratefully for the warning she had given her; but, thinking of Lady Caroline as she did, it was difficult to speak of her with sincerity to so near a relation,—and her new friend seemed to understand this.

After she retired to her own room, she mused long upon the occurrences of the evening, and upon the conduct of each of the Lady Mortimers. The more she admired the kindness and forbearance of the one, the more deeply disgusted did she feel with the ill-nature, selfishness, and duplicity of the other; and, as she contrasted their characters in her mind, she was much mortified at having undervalued Lady Agnes, and proportionally ashamed of having looked up to her sister almost as to a divinity.

Meanwhile Lady Caroline was indignant at

discovering that Miss Mordaunt could no longer be either duped or intimidated by her artifices. She hoped the information she had given her concerning Lord Delmore's private proceedings would effectually prevent her ever agreeing to a union with him. She considered her growing intimacy with Lady Agnes as mortifying to her personal vanity, and consequently as a very unpardonable offence. Her own boasted friendship for Augusta had been wholly of an interested nature. She had thought her beautiful—she had rendered her fashionable, and she had perhaps been amused by the *naïveté* of her conversation; yet she had not scrupled deliberately to sap the foundation of all her good principles, in order to be able more successfully to destroy her happiness. Her plans had unfortunately answered too well; and when her victim seemed now inclined to receive her treacherous advances with unwonted coldness, she was unreasonable enough to be highly exasperated against her.

There was little visible difference in Lady Caroline's manner towards Augusta; but she constantly contrived, as if unintentionally, to say very bitter, disagreeable things to her; and when she spoke of her to others, she endea-

voured, under an affectation of pity, to place her in a contemptible or ridiculous point of view.

"I used to delight in Augusta Mordaunt," observed she carelessly one day to an audience of gentlemen: "I was quite fascinated by her singular beauty and simplicity: I admire her very much still; but the charm begins to lose its power, and I suspect she is better suited to be Agnes's friend than mine. She is a foolish, romantic girl; with too little character to be able to form a judgment for herself, and too little spirit to dare to act according to her own inclination. She may talk sentiment and morality to my good, amiable sister, all day long; it would bore *me* to death to listen to her, but Agnes will hear her very patiently."

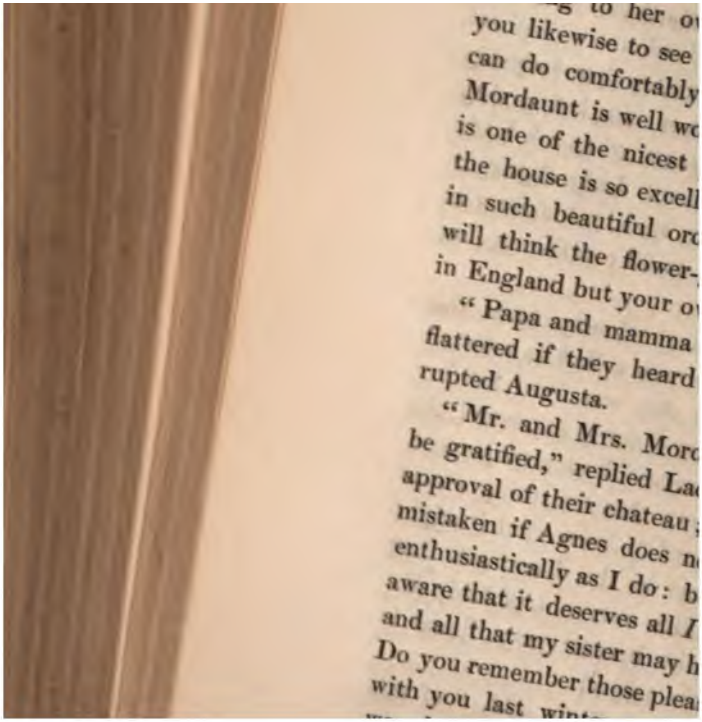
Augusta bore Lady Caroline's insolence with great temper, though she often longed to retort upon her and resent it. Upon no occasion did she entirely lose her self-command, and under all her vexations she found much comfort in the support she received from Lady Agnes. In short, the society of the latter soon became so agreeable to her, that she felt no reason to regret being partially estranged from the *coterie* of her original friend.

Mr. Mordaunt did not make the slightest

diminution in the assiduous homage he had been accustomed to pay to Lady Caroline Mortimer; yet he contrived to treat Lady Agnes also with peculiar attention. Mrs. Mordaunt visibly encouraged the intimacy between her ladyship and her daughter; and the evening before they were to return home, she ventured to ask Lady Estonville if she would trust Lady Agnes to her care, and allow her to spend a few days at Mordaunt whenever she could contrive to part with her.

The countess smiled graciously upon this proposal; Lady Agnes was called to assist at the council; an early day was fixed for her visit, and Augusta very warmly expressed the pleasure she felt at so agreeable an arrangement. Lady Caroline, who saw that something was in agitation, came forward to learn what it might be. She took no part in the discussion; but when the young ladies were out of Lady Estonville's hearing, she became very liberal in her remarks upon the subject.

"I approve amazingly," she said, "of this little scheme which our two mammas have projected so nicely between them. It will be the most agreeable thing for you, Agnes, that can possibly be fancied. I will not mention the pleasure you will feel in being with our dear,

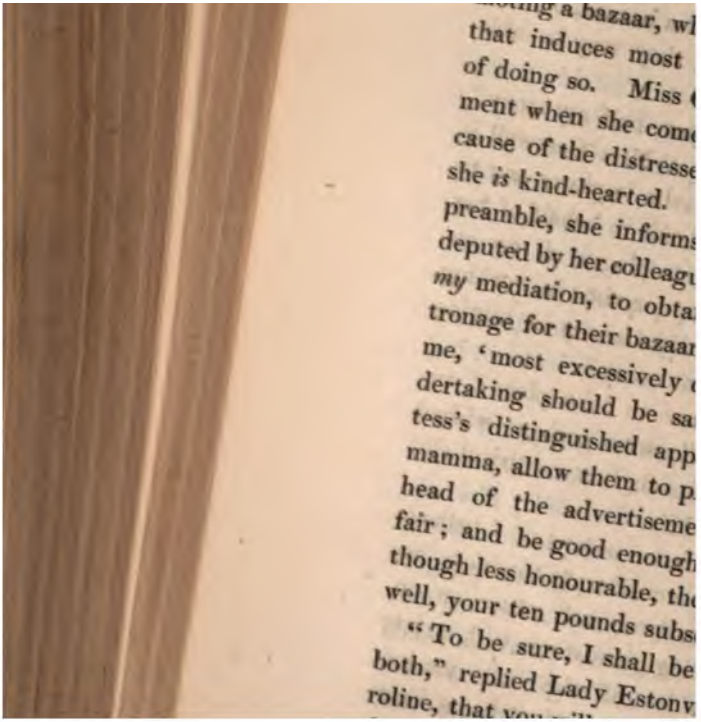


Mordaunt, smiling, "since the omission was mamma's, and not mine. Of course, it would have given me double satisfaction to have seen you both."

"Oh, I am convinced that it would: I was not angry with you in earnest, *ma belle*, so you need not put on that frightened face. Your pretty little compliment is the more valuable, too, because I know you have forsworn flattery, and are become too good a girl to dare to tell stories or to make empty professions."

The next morning Lady Caroline Mortimer made her appearance with an open letter in her hand.

"I have just received a most important communication," she exclaimed, "from that interesting friend of mine, Miss Carewell. She sent it by an express, and her courier has directions to wait for my answer. Now, ladies and gentlemen, as her proposal, or rather her request, concerns the public in general nearly as much as it does me in particular, I ought not to lose a moment in placing it before you. It seems that Miss Carewell and several other benevolent ladies in her neighbourhood are extremely anxious to get up a bazaar at Somerton for the benefit of the Dispensary, the Poor-house, or some institution,—I do not exactly remember what: but



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yourself when your letters are addressed to her. It is certainly very fair," added he, "that they should expect us to support a bazaar, or anything else of the kind that they may be able to set on foot at Somerton."

"I have not yet told you half my story," continued Lady Caroline. "Miss Carewell is a little unreasonable, for she implores me to interest my numerous friends in behalf of her scheme;—in other words, to plague all my acquaintance to misspend their time in working for her, and to waste their money in buying rubbish which nobody can want."

"When is the bazaar to take place?" inquired Lord Estonville, who perhaps wished to stop the flow of his daughter's satirical eloquence.

"The first week in the new year, I believe. The projectors, with considerate kindness, are anxious to afford mammas and papas an opportunity of providing themselves with pretty Christmas presents for all the little masters and misses who will at that time be at home for their holidays."

"That is not ill imagined," observed Mr. Mordaunt with a sneer. "Bazaars are abominable nuisances; there really ought to be

some protective measure devised to shield one against their vexatious encroachments upon one's purse and one's patience."

"And yet, after all," pursued Lady Caroline, suddenly changing her tone, "it will be rather good fun to go over with a large pleasant party, to see Miss Carewell in all her glory, surrounded by the Somerton ladies, her attendant satellites. I can perfectly fancy the whole scene."

"Lady Estonville," said the earl, "since we are all to support this bazaar, we must persuade our friends from Mordaunt to come over here and spend the week with us whenever it occurs. Mr. Mordaunt will, I fear, be inclined to set his face against such a proposal; but if he will consent to join us at Estonville, we will engage not to insist upon his accompanying us to Somerton. Your youngest son," concluded he, addressing himself to Mrs. Mordaunt, "will, I suppose, be then with you; and I trust *he* will not refuse to make one of our party. I suspect it would be in vain to invite the captain to travel from Scotland to do homage to Miss Carewell. Her smiles would scarcely reward him for the trouble of his journey: though I have heard it whispered

that she once imagined he was desperately in love with her. Should he, however, accidentally happen to come into this neighbourhood before the bazaar, it would of course give us much pleasure to consider him included in your engagement."

CHAPTER IX.

——————— He says, he loves my daughter!
I think so too: for never gazed the moon
Upon the water, as he 'll stand and read,
As 'twere, my daughter's eyes.

SHAKSPEARE.

AUGUSTA MORDAUNT wrote her eldest brother a long account of her visit at Estonville. She described to him the manner in which she had been received by Lady Caroline Mortimer, and the sort of terms upon which they now stood; and while she spoke with enthusiasm of Lady Agnes, she said she believed she was indebted to *his* good offices for the kindness she had shown towards her.

Charles was too well-bred not to return a speedy answer of thanks for this interesting communication; and at the end of his letter, he requested his sister to let him know the exact day on which she expected her new friend at Mordaunt.

It happened that Lady Agnes was unable to

fulfil her engagement at the period she had originally intended. The unlooked-for arrival of some formal relations then detained her at home; but after this, and a variety of other delays, she had at length the satisfaction of making out her promised visit. The pleasure her host and hostess expressed at seeing her was very flattering, and she was still more gratified by the delight that beamed in Augusta's countenance.

"We are quite alone to-day," said Mrs. Mordaunt, as she conducted her guest to her room before dinner. "To-morrow Dr. Stanley and his daughters are coming to stay with us, and I trust you will think them pleasant people. Augusta would not allow me to invite a party; she pleaded that, if she had many other visitors to attend to, she should not be able to enjoy *your* society."

Lady Agnes truly declared that she should have been quite mortified if it had been considered necessary to ask company to entertain her: at the same time she added that it would give her much satisfaction to make the Miss Stanleys' acquaintance.

Lady Estonville had allowed her daughter to be absent a week; and the hours glided so agreeably away, that when evening came round,

Lady Agnes always felt sorry to think another day was gone. She found Augusta a very engaging companion; she was much pleased with Laura Stanley, and she looked up to her sister with great esteem. Nor must it be forgotten, that the elders of the party were all amusing persons in their different ways, and that they were desirous to render themselves so to her.

Dr. Stanley and his eldest daughter left Mordaunt Park before the Sunday; but they agreed that Laura should remain there till Lady Agnes Mortimer returned to Estonville.

The days were now very short; and the evening before the trio was to be broken up, the young ladies, who had just come back from a late walk, had established themselves round the fire. Mrs. Mordaunt had retired to her own apartment, and it was growing so dusk that objects out of doors were scarcely discernible.

"'When shall we three meet again?'" remarked Augusta thoughtfully. "I am so sorry to consider that our delightful ramble this morning was the last we shall take together at present! It really seems too much good fortune to have had you both staying here at the same time; and indeed I cannot express to

you how much heartfelt enjoyment your society has afforded me."

Before either of her friends could make her any reply, they were all much startled by hearing the sound of a carriage driving up to the house-door.

"A visitor!" exclaimed Augusta. "Who can possibly be coming to see us?"

A blush spread itself over Laura's countenance; and Lady Agnes half started from her chair, trembled violently, but did not speak.

Meanwhile the stranger had gained admittance. The jingling step of a hack-chaise had been let down, and some person was heard advancing towards the drawing-room. Augusta listened attentively for a moment.

"It is Charles!" cried she in a joyful tone: "I cannot be mistaken in *his* footstep. What a welcome—what a delightful surprise!" And she darted to the door to receive him.

The meeting between the brother and sister was a very affectionate one on both sides. Captain Mordaunt, however, soon disengaged himself from Augusta, and walked forward to greet her companions, whose presence he perhaps expected: he seemed, at least, to be perfectly aware that he should find one of them staying at Mordaunt.

Lady Agnes looked very pale, and her manner was rather nervous; yet it was impossible to doubt that it gave her pleasure to see him, or to suspect that she did not speak sincerely when she told him, "that she was very glad he had arrived at home before she returned to Estonville."

"And now, Charles," said his sister, "may I venture to inquire what has procured us the happiness of your company, and likewise why you did not send us notice of your approach?"

Captain Mordaunt appeared a little confused.

"My dear Augusta," he replied, "I must confess that your questions are rather inquisitorial. Is not the pleasure of seeing *you* a sufficient inducement to bring me to Mordaunt? And, as to my not having given you proper warning of the good fortune that awaited you, I can only answer, that a soldier is not sufficiently the master of his own actions to be able to say what he will do many days beforehand. But where are my father and mother? Are they quite well?"

"They are, and I will go and tell them the good news of your arrival."

Ere Augusta could leave the room, however, Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt made their appear-

ance. They had learned the cause of the bustle they heard in the house, and had hastened to welcome their son. They both wondered that Charles did not explain the reason of his journey: Mrs. Mordaunt feared that his silence upon the subject boded nothing agreeable, and she could at length restrain her curiosity upon the subject no longer.

"It is most delightful to have you with us," she observed: "but what has brought you here just now? — has any extraordinary circumstance occurred?"

"None, my dearest mother, I assure you; so pray do not be alarmed. I have some business upon which I wish to consult my father; and as I judged it would be more satisfactory to talk it over with him than to explain it by letter, I have travelled here for that purpose. I trust your dinner-hour is not very distant; for it is so long since I have had any refreshment, that I begin to feel tolerably hungry."

"Laura," whispered Miss Mordaunt, as they proceeded together towards their different rooms, "I think I can guess the nature of my brother's *business*. He told me the truth, when he said that he came home for the pleasure of seeing a fair lady at Mordaunt; though

he was guilty of a little equivocation in pretending that *I* was that lady. Do you understand me?"

"I believe I do," replied Laura, smiling: "indeed, I had already suspected something of the kind."

Augusta was not mistaken in her conjecture. As soon as Charles was left alone with his father, he opened his whole mind to him—confessed his attachment for Lady Agnes Mortimer—said he hoped Mr. Mordaunt admired the daughter-in-law he was desirous of bringing into his family—and finally, requested to know if he could have the kindness to make such arrangements as might entitle him to endeavour to obtain the young lady's consent to his proposing for her in due form to Lord Estonville.

Mr. Mordaunt told his son he had long suspected the state of his affections, and had consequently studied Lady Agnes's character: that he much approved of his choice; and as the connexion was in every way desirable, he was determined to do all in his power to promote his wishes. He added, that he was himself just at present somewhat embarrassed in his circumstances; but that if Lord Estonville would come forward handsomely, he had no doubt the marriage might be very well made out.

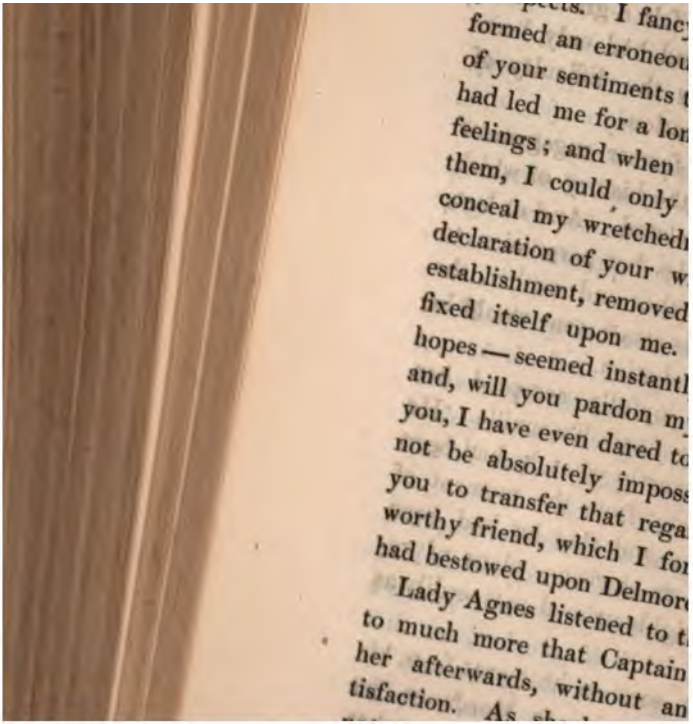
Charles had not quite expected that his father would have entered so readily into his views, and he overwhelmed him with expressions of gratitude. He flattered himself, from a thousand little circumstances, that Lady Agnes liked him; yet this was only conjecture; and until he had had an opportunity of pleading his cause to her explicitly, and of obtaining a confirmation of his hopes from her own lips, he felt that his chance of happiness was extremely insecure.

When the tea was removed, Captain Mordaunt persuaded Lady Agnes to look over a collection of foreign views which he had several times described to her. She had not examined more than one or two of them, before he said in a low voice,

"You cannot imagine the dreadful suspense and anxiety I have suffered since we parted. You must recollect the last walk we took together; —though I believe you half promised me that you would try to forget everything about it."

"I am afraid you suspect then," replied Lady Agnes, "that I am not always careful in keeping my promises."

"That was an eventful morning to me," continued Charles, without adverting to her answer. "I then made a discovery which in-



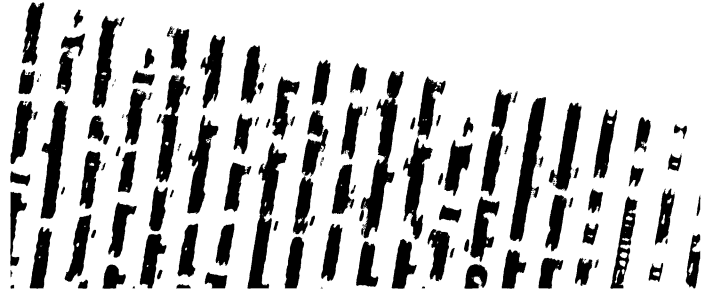
feel so perfectly at her ease with him as she had done. She added, that when he became better known to her, she had often felt a great inclination to undeceive him, and had only been deterred from doing so by the difficulty of entering into such an explanation.

She then alluded to her former engagement to Lionel's elder brother; the history of which she briefly but distinctly related. And at last, when she had given Charles her permission to plead his cause to her father and mother, she confessed a hope that his attachment would be sanctioned by their approbation.

Captain Mordaunt joyfully accepted her allowance to apply to Lord Estonville. He assured her this was exactly what he had been most anxious to obtain from the moment of their last separation; and that he had been constantly occupied in devising plans of returning into her neighbourhood as speedily as possible.

He said, that as soon as he learnt from his sister that she was coming to Mordaunt, he determined to be there to meet her; but that owing to the delays that had put off her arrival from one period to another, he had at last found great difficulty in obtaining his leave, and had almost despaired of reaching home before her





going to happen, and I now wish you joy with all my heart."

"Thank you, good kind Augusta; but take no farther notice at present of what has passed. You shall hear and know everything to-morrow."

Miss Mordaunt had wished Lady Agnes good night, when the latter called her back into her room, and asked her if she would not stay with her for five minutes.

"Most readily," answered Augusta.

Lady Agnes shut the door, stirred the fire, hesitated, stammered, and at length remarked,

"I begged you to remain with me, because there is a secret I am desirous of confiding to you."

Augusta took pity upon her confusion.

"I will spare you all farther explanation," she said, "for I know very well what you were going to tell me."

Then throwing her arms affectionately round her neck, she continued,

"You have consented, dearest Agnes, to become my sister—to render Charles as happy as he deserves to be."

Augusta Mordaunt's manner was naturally engaging; and though it had at one period been a good deal spoilt by affectation, there

was at times something peculiarly winning and delightful in it. Lady Agnes now thought it so in a very remarkable degree; she could not help suspecting that her own sisters would have treated her very differently under similar circumstances; she was in a state of mind to feel even unusually gratified by kindness, and her heart warmed towards her amiable companion.

Laura Stanley returned home immediately after breakfast the following morning. While his sister accompanied her to the door, Captain Mordaunt asked Lady Agnes if she had any commands to give him for Estonville Castle?

"None, thank you," replied she; "since I shall be there myself in a few hours."

He left the room as his mother and Augusta re-entered it, having previously remarked, "that he hoped and intended to come back from his ride in time to see her again before her departure."

In truth, he did not linger upon his road; and when he drew near his destination, he had the good fortune to meet Lord Estonville riding alone in the park. The earl expressed astonishment at seeing him; and Charles in a hurried manner explained the cause of his sudden return from the north, and of his early visit to him that morning.

Lord Estonville heard all this with secret satisfaction; but in order to enhance the value of his compliance, he assumed a hauteur of expression and demeanour which was very discouraging. He found, however, that Charles was so much in earnest as not to be easily daunted; he therefore paid him some flattering personal compliments, and after having gone through the form of talking of settlements, and of seeming to weigh the possibility of bestowing his daughter's hand upon an untitled suitor, he at length told Captain Mordaunt, "that if his father would engage to make him a suitable provision, he should have much pleasure in receiving him into his family."

Charles had too proud a spirit not to feel that Lord Estonville had treated him more haughtily than he had any right to do; yet he was too much in love with Lady Agnes to quarrel with the terms in which her father had thought proper to couch his assent to his proposal.

The earl invited him to return to Estonville either that day or the day following, and to prevail upon Mr. Mordaunt to accompany him; as he said he was anxious to discuss matters with the latter as soon as possible.

"You must not be offended, my dear Captain

scarcely find leisure to bestow much attention upon *you*.

Lady Caroline was completely puzzled, and her father was much diverted by the repeated attempts she made to unravel the mystery. He assured her, "that the appearance of the guests would be a most agreeable surprise to her." And to mystify her more entirely, he added, "that he had not himself been aware of their approach until several hours after the arrival of the post."

Her ladyship was by nature extremely curious, and she never could bear the idea of not being perfectly acquainted with everything that was going forward: she half suspected from Lord Estonville's manner, that he was endeavouring to impose upon her credulity; and having once taken this fancy into her head, she soon became persuaded that the visitors must be most extraordinary quizzes. They were perhaps electioneering friends; and she determined to revenge herself upon her father for having teased her about them, by laughing at them unmercifully.

When Lady Agnes reached home, she found nobody down-stairs to receive her but her sister.

"You are very late," said Lady Caroline:

"I presume you felt great difficulty in tearing yourself away from your dear friends at Mordaunt. I need not ask you if you have spent your days pleasantly there. You must give me a long account this evening of all the interesting particulars of your visit: I should not perhaps have time to listen to them now, for I am in momentary expectation of the arrival of two beaux whom my father has desired me to treat with distinguished attention."

Lady Agnes thought her sister had taken rather a peculiar mode of letting her know that she was aware of her engagement.

"I hope, dear Caroline," she replied in an agitated voice, "that you will welcome these guests with kind cordiality."

"To be sure I shall; and I shall of course expect you to assist me in performing the task of entertaining them. Indeed, from some hints my father threw out, I fancy they will be rather better suited to your taste than to mine.—But, in the name of Heaven! what is the matter with you, Agnes?—you look pale as a ghost, and you tremble from head to foot! Are you ill?"

"No," answered Lady Agnes; "but I confess I feel a little hurried. I shall have quite recovered my composure," she added with a

smile, "before the two gentlemen you alluded to just now can make their appearance."

Lady Caroline continued to gaze at her with much curiosity, and she would have pursued her interrogations, had not a servant come into the room to say that Lady Estonville wished to see Lady Agnes immediately in her own apartment.

Her ladyship had scarcely departed to obey this summons, when her father entered the library.

"Where is Agnes?" he inquired: "I was told she was returned."

"She is just gone to mamma's room," answered Lady Caroline. "She ought really to be very much flattered at the impatience every one seems to feel to greet her upon her arrival at Estonville after a week's absence."

"You have seen your sister, then?" continued the earl, without appearing to notice his daughter's spiteful and impertinent observation.

"Yes, I had a passing glimpse of her, and no more. She did not tell me what she had been doing at Mordaunt; but it struck me that her friends have not sent her home in very blooming looks or happy spirits. I hope they

have not received any unpleasant or alarming intelligence from Scotland."

"Make yourself easy upon that point," replied Lord Estonville. He had not time to add another word, before Mr. Mordaunt and Captain Mordaunt were announced.

Lady Caroline was actually petrified with surprise. The mystery was now cleared up: her father's guests stood before her; and she had discovered the cause of her sister's unwonted agitation. The indignant jealousy which she secretly felt towards Lady Agnes, was only equalled by her vexation at having been kept so adroitly in the dark. With all her boasted quickness of perception and prophetic foresight, it was too provoking to have been completely duped upon this occasion; and she considered it particularly insulting that a secret of such importance should have been communicated to every member of the family except herself. She was so entirely thrown off her guard, that she remained staring at the father and son, without seeming to recollect that it was incumbent upon her to take the slightest notice of either of them.

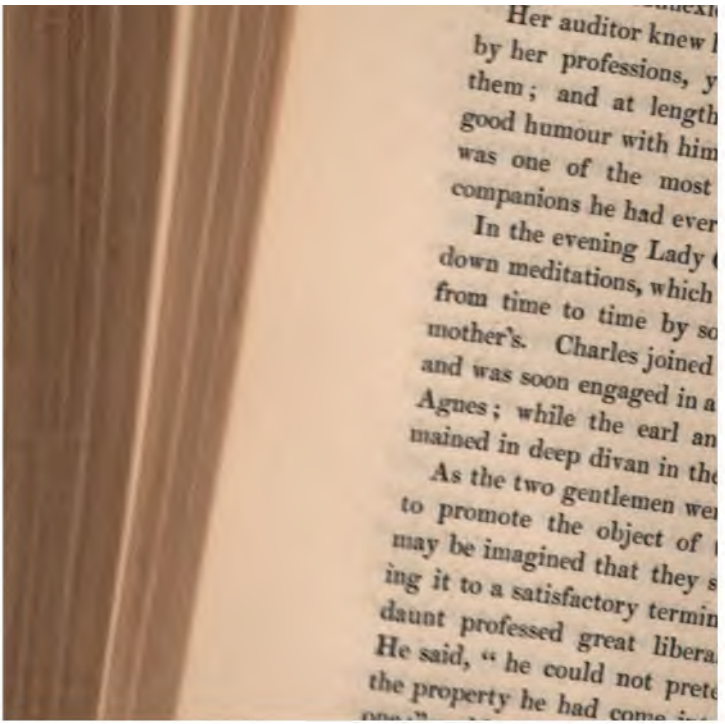
Lord Estonville had received them with flattering cordiality, and was evidently both

shocked and displeased at his daughter's extraordinary behaviour.

"Caroline," said he in a tone between joke and anger, "your amazement is really amusing!—it has literally struck you dumb; a circumstance I never remember occurring to you before. You were partly prepared for this agreeable surprise, since I gave you notice that something of the kind was impending. My secret is a secret no longer. Lady Caroline Mortimer, allow me to present Captain Mordaunt to you as your future brother-in-law."

Lady Caroline contrived to stammer out some expressions of happiness and congratulation; but her words did not flow with their usual ease and eloquence, and her manner did not immediately regain its accustomed grace.

If during the first moments of her astonishment she had betrayed her internal feelings, she was too thoroughly accomplished in the art of dissimulation to permit them afterwards to be perceptible: and while jealousy, malice, and every evil passion were rankling at her heart, she came down to dinner with a smiling countenance, addressed her conversation chiefly to Mr. Mordaunt, and declared her delight, her enchantment, at the idea of the approach-



that he had himself been obliged to set out by making an enormous outlay, in order to bring matters to rights again."—"This he mentioned," he remarked, "in *strict confidence*. The inconvenience consequent upon these requisite expenses was, of course, only temporary; and he now regretted it the more, as it would prevent his settling so large an allowance upon his son as he was desirous to do."

The fortune he proposed to give Charles was not perhaps quite so handsome as Lord Estonville had hoped for, yet it was not small enough to be rejected. He had a tolerably good house about twenty miles from Mordaunt, which had been let to the same tenant for many years; the lease was to expire in eight months, and this place he offered to furnish and put into repair for his son; while the earl engaged to give his daughter ten thousand pounds upon the day of her marriage, and to leave her as much more at his death.

Charles did not wish to remain in the army as a married man; and as the arrangements respecting his future residence would require time, it was settled that his union with Lady Agnes should not take place for a year. He expostulated warmly against so long a delay, yet he found himself at last obliged to submit

to it: he even consented not to ask at present for an extension of his leave, as his father thought it expedient for him to return to his regiment until he had taken his measures for going upon half-pay.

The intended marriage was to be communicated to the relations of both families; and in the first instance to Lady Delmore, who would, it was feared, be unreasonable enough to be furiously indignant at hearing that Lady Agnes had allowed any one to replace her son in her affections. It was not, however, to be declared to the world in general:—perhaps Lord Estonville fancied it was not quite impossible that some unforeseen event might frustrate a scheme which was to remain in abeyance for many months, and that it would then prove a disadvantage to his daughter to have had it publicly talked of: or perhaps he thought Lady Caroline might behave better to her sister, if she did not see her regularly treated as a *fiancée* by all the visitors who came to stay at Estonville.

CHAPTER X.

Isabella.—'Tis an unlucky accident indeed.

Camillo.—Ah, Isabella! Fate has now determined my undoing. This thing can ne'er end here. Leonora and Lorenzo must soon come to some explanation——which must discover all.

SIR JOHN VANBRUGH.

His cousin's intended marriage had been announced to Lord Delmore both by herself and by Captain Mordaunt; and he had written to each, to offer them his warmest congratulations, and to assure them of the heartfelt pleasure the intelligence had afforded him.

In the end of his letter to Lady Agnes, he said, "that he should return to England about Christmas, and should make a point of stopping to see her at Estonville in his way to D'Arcy." He added, "that as he could not now expect Mordaunt to pay him the long visit he had promised him, he must content himself with the idea of spending another winter

in cheerless solitude; but that he hoped his friend would make up to him for this disappointment, by bringing her to the North the following year to assist him in rendering his hermitage a little more habitable."

Lady Agnes was half tempted to show this letter to Augusta. Since her engagement to Captain Mordaunt, she had frequently expressed to him her conviction that his sister and Lionel were under the influence of some unfortunate delusion, which led them to think unfavourably of each other. Charles had always agreed that this appeared extremely probable; but added, that their blindness or prejudice, or whatever it was, seemed to him to be so deeply rooted, that he was afraid it was quite incurable.

Lady Agnes almost feared so too; yet, when she found that her cousin was coming to Estonville, she determined to endeavour to discover the offence, real or imaginary, which he had conceived from, or given to, Augusta. She thought that if she could once ascertain that point, she need not despair of bringing about a reconciliation between them. She was aware of her sister's secret attachment for Lionel, and she strongly suspected that it was some cruel contrivance of hers which had first caused, and

afterwards fomented, his quarrel with the unsuspecting object of his affections.

Late in the month of December, Lord Delmore wrote to his uncle to inform him of his arrival in London, and his intention of being at Estonville early in the following week. A very large party was assembled there at that period; and besides strangers, Lady Mary and Mr. Carrington, and Philip Mortimer, were spending the Christmas season with their family.

Lionel found so little to detain him in town, that he set out upon his journey rather sooner than he had proposed to do; and he consequently reached Estonville before he was expected there. As he made his appearance late in the afternoon, everybody was dispersed in different directions, and he did not find a creature either in the hall or the library. He inquired if Lady Agnes was at home, but was told she was just gone out in the carriage; so he quietly took possession of the empty house, threw himself into an arm-chair, and soon became involved in a labyrinth of bitter and distressing reflections.

Lord Delmore was at length startled in his reverie by the sound of approaching voices, and he quickly distinguished that Lady Caroline was one of the speakers.

The library at Estonville was a long room with two fire-places; and the arm-chair in which Lionel had ensconced himself was placed close to that most remote from the entrance, and had its back turned towards the door. Owing to this circumstance, Lady Caroline and Lady Mary Carrington did not perceive him, though they had come in purposely to seek him; but *he* had the advantage of seeing *their* figures reflected in a mirror.

"What can have become of Lionel?" exclaimed Lady Caroline in a tone of vexation: "they told us that he was in this room."

"He has probably rambled out to look for us," replied Lady Mary more calmly; "therefore the best thing we can do is to sit down here and wait for his return. If we make any farther attempt to find him, we shall be like children playing at hide-and-seek, who are sure never to meet each other."

Lord Delmore had risen to advance towards his cousins; but he became riveted to the spot where he had originally placed himself, when he heard Lady Mary observe,—

"Really, Caroline, you betray more disappointment than the case requires. I believe you are afraid that Lionel has flown over to

Mordaunt, to see Augusta, and beseech her to forgive him all his sins."

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Lady Caroline in a pettish voice. "You know I completely settled that business long ago, and that I never can have anything more to apprehend from *la belle Auguste*. I have little doubt that she is still just as much attached to Lionel as she was when I first troubled the smooth course of their true love; yet, if he were at this very moment kneeling in sackcloth at her feet, the poor fool would not dare to marry him. He thinks her a heartless flirt and a coquette—and well may he do so; but you and I could tell him, if we chose it, that she did not care a straw for any of her London admirers. In an instant of pique she was betrayed into accepting a man whom she despised, yet no earthly consideration could induce her to become that man's wife."

This curious dialogue was here interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who came to put on some coals. The two sisters retreated a few steps, and in so doing discovered Lord Delmore stationed at the other end of the library: his arms were folded, he was motionless as a statue, and his eyes were fixed sternly upon them.

It would be impossible to describe the guilty

confusion with which both his cousins were overwhelmed: Lady Caroline looked at him as she would have gazed upon a spectre, and then uttering a wild shriek, sunk almost fainting upon a sofa.

The servant was much alarmed at her distress, and asked Lady Mary, in a trembling voice, if he should call anybody to her ladyship's assistance.

"No," replied she; "it is not necessary. There is no cause to be frightened. Lady Caroline has twisted her foot, and the pain which she feels now will soon go off entirely."

The man accordingly retired, and Lord Delmore came forward.

"Ladies," he said very proudly, "it is not my practice, and it certainly was not my intention, to be an eaves-dropper; yet I confess that I have accidentally overheard every syllable of your conversation. I was irresistibly tempted to listen to what I found it might be deeply important to myself to know; and I bless the chance which has thus disclosed to me your treachery."

The coldness and scorn with which her cousin treated her, were much more mortifying to Lady Caroline than the bitterest reproaches

would have been: she hid her face in her hands, and sobbed aloud.

"Have you no pity for poor Caroline?" cried Lady Mary in a supplicating tone. "Can you bear unmoved to see her thus breaking her heart? Oh, Lionel! remember that we have all been brought up as one family; that it would be most unnatural if we were to turn against each other now! She must indeed plead guilty of having deceived you; but if she endeavoured to lower in your estimation a person whom she really believed unworthy of your affection, the motive that induced her to do so binds you in gratitude to compassionate and to forgive her."

"The gratitude I may owe her, I am yet to discover," replied Lord Delmore. "What pity has she felt for me? What compassion has she shown for Miss Mordaunt?" continued he more sternly. "I have received the cruelest and most unprovoked injury at Caroline's hands; and until she has repaired as far as lies in her power the mischief she has occasioned, I can neither be melted by *her* tears nor appeased by *your* eloquence."

Lady Caroline started upon her feet, and drawing up her figure to its full height,—

"Do you think," she exclaimed with an air

of defiance, "that you can command me to humble myself before you—to bewail my offences, and to sue for mercy and for pardon to you and to Augusta Mordaunt?"

"I expect nothing unreasonable," answered Lionel calmly: "far less do I wish to impose upon you any unnecessary humiliation. But since I understood from your expressions just now, that you had intentionally prejudiced Miss Mordaunt against me, I must insist upon your taking the earliest opportunity of explaining to her the injustice of your former representations."

Lady Caroline's whole frame trembled, and she turned perfectly white with suppressed rage. She almost bit her lip through, before she could regain any tolerable degree of command over her feelings. At length she said,

"When you condescended to listen to words which you were aware were not intended to meet your ear, you heard me remark that I had prevailed upon you to believe a former lady love of yours was a flirt and a coquette: and what I added afterwards, informed you that the picture I had drawn you of her character was an exaggerated one. But you never heard me declare that I had accused you of any faults to Augusta. I know better than to commit

myself in that way, since I suspected she might probably repeat such accusations to yourself; and I felt sure that she liked you too well to be inclined to give credit to unfavourable accounts of you. I resolved to adopt a different course—to contrive to make you ruin yourself in her estimation, by persuading you to treat her with coldness, caprice, and neglect. You will not deny that I succeeded; and that thus it was not *my words*, but *your own deeds*, which prejudiced her so violently against you. I am ready, if you require it, to retract to Miss Mordaunt in your presence every unkind and injurious thing that *I* can recollect, or *you* can remind me of having said to you about her."

Lord Delmore beat his forehead with his clenched hands.

"I have, indeed," he exclaimed bitterly, "been so thoroughly, so unpardonably duped, that I almost deserve the disappointment and misery I have brought upon myself."

"I hear people coming," remarked Lady Mary, whose head was generally as cool as her heart. "Caroline, pull down your veil,—and Lionel, pray smooth your brow: if we cannot help disagreeing amongst ourselves in private, we need not be foolish and ridiculous enough to publish our quarrels."

Neither of her companions made her any answer, but both seemed to feel the expediency of following her advice; and when they were joined by the ladies who had been out driving, and some of the gentlemen who had been riding nobody but Lady Agnes perceived any traces of unusual emotion in their countenances.

After Lady Estonville had welcomed Lord Delmore, and expressed her delight at seeing him sooner than she had anticipated—and after he had conversed for about ten minutes with the rest of the party, he turned a second time to Lady Agnes. He told her in a low voice, that he had been looking forward with much satisfaction to having a comfortable gossip with her upon a subject which was, he assured her, one of peculiar interest to him.

His cousin thanked him very affectionately for his kindness; and placing her arm within his, she walked towards that part of the room where he had originally established himself.

"I did not draw you aside," she remarked in a tone which was audible to him only, "to speak of my own concerns, but to ask you what is the matter with you? Have you had any dispute with Caroline since your arrival here?" Then looking anxiously in his face, upon which the last rays of the setting sun

happened at that moment to have fallen, she exclaimed with more alarm, "Dearest Lionel, you must be ill, or in distress,—or both."

"My kind Agnes," replied he, "you are a good physiognomist; and when you guessed that my mind is ill at ease, you were not mistaken. I am nearly distracted,—at least, I have just made a discovery which is enough to drive me mad."

"Let me entreat you to tell me what this dreadful discovery is!" said Lady Agnes, very earnestly.

"It will indeed be a comfort to me to do so," continued Lionel. "I have found too much reason to distrust most of those who have professed themselves my friends; but I know that I may depend upon *your* truth, and I stand greatly in need of your counsel."

He then proceeded to give her a minute account of the scene which had taken place between her sisters and himself; and when he had concluded his relation, Lady Agnes observed,

"I am much more shocked than surprised by what I have now heard, for I have long suspected something of this kind. We must think of what is to be done; since I trust the evil is not past a remedy, and that you will yet be able to make your peace with Augusta. She

has been for many months a great favourite of mine;—I have never ventured to talk to her of you: but, if you wish it, I shall have much pleasure in hazarding an attempt to plead to her in your behalf—and I think I can at least persuade her to listen to your story. We will remember all this to-night: our conference has now lasted so long that it is beginning to look quite particular. My father, too, will soon be coming in, and will expect to hear some description of your tour."

All this while Lady Mary Carrington had been flirting, first with one person and then with another, with her usual easy volubility; but, in spite of her apparent carelessness, she had contrived to watch her sister and Lord Delmore very narrowly.

Lady Caroline had made her escape to her own room. When she found herself suddenly surrounded by companions, she was still in too violent a state of excitement to endure the society of indifferent people: and she felt conscious that her agitation must be sufficiently visible not to remain unobserved. She therefore pretended that her shoes were wet, and that, if she did not intend to catch her death from cold, she must go and change them. Before her ladyship reappeared, she had as-

sumed a semblance of gaiety; and during dinner she took care to speak very frequently to Lionel across the table. She informed him of the bazaar which was soon to take place at Somerton, "under the illustrious patronage of the Countess of Estonville;" and said, "she trusted that he would honour it with his august presence." And when he told her he should have left the neighbourhood before the period she alluded to, she expressed great regret at the intelligence, and requested, in a voice of comic entreaty, "that he would at any rate please to bestow his charity upon poor interesting Miss Carewell, and contribute a small donation in aid of her meritorious undertaking."

Lord Delmore was really surprised at his cousin's assurance. He carried on the farce of cordiality with her as well as he could; yet, if he spared her the mortification of letting others see him treat her with coldness, every turn of his manner, every look directed towards her, was perfectly comprehensible to herself; and she writhed internally under the aversion and contempt she perceived that he felt for her.

In the evening, Lady Caroline complained of a bad headache. She certainly looked ill, and seemed unable to sustain her part in conversation with her accustomed animation; and

having tried in vain to find relief from a cup of very strong coffee, she declared "that she felt quite stupified," and retired very early.

Lady Mary Carrington contrived for some time to engross Lord Delmore's attention. She asked him all sorts of questions about the places he had just visited upon the Continent;—about the English travellers and foreigners of note he had met with in his tour;—and endeavoured to conciliate him, and to insinuate herself again into his good graces by every means she could devise. She found him, however, provokingly impenetrable to flattery; and when she attempted to work upon his compassion by saying how very wretched poor Caroline was about what had occurred in the morning, and hinted her fears that her sister's distress was making her seriously ill, Lionel returned no reply to her observations, but walked to the other side of the room, where he quietly took his place by Lady Agnes for the rest of the evening.

The two cousins seized this opportunity of discussing all the circumstances relating to his attachment to Miss Mordaunt. He told Lady Agnes he had fallen deeply in love with Augusta when he first met her at Mr. Wingfield's, and had felt much tempted to propose to her there; but that he had not done so, because he

wished to see a little more of her before he took so decided a step. He said he had intended to spend some weeks at Mordaunt during the following winter; but that when he arrived at Estonville, he found, to his great mortification and dismay, that she was engaged in what he supposed to be a decided flirtation with Philip. That in a fit of jealousy he had gone off immediately to London; but had afterwards repented his precipitate rashness, and had determined to watch Augusta's future conduct with unprejudiced eyes; and to form his final opinion of her character, by observing what effect a season of gaiety would have upon her.

"When Caroline came to town," he continued, "she often spoke to me of her dear friend *la belle Auguste;* and though she always praised her very highly, she took care to hint that she was inclined to be a terrible flirt. She mentioned, as if accidentally, that the silly little *tendre* between her and Philip had long come to an end; but she insinuated that the young lady had since been much disposed to encourage an affair of a more serious nature, and had found a most devoted admirer in Mr. Stafford.

"The Mordaunts arrived in London; and my own observation, seconded by Caroline's representations, soon convinced me that all she

had told me of Augusta was too true. Stafford's attentions to her were remarked by everybody: I had formerly despised him, and I now began absolutely to hate the sight of him. Miss Mordaunt had, it must be confessed, given *me* a very gratifying reception the first time I met her; but as I was taught to believe that, though she did not really care for me, she wished to retain me among the number of her *adorateurs*, I was rather provoked than flattered by this circumstance. You know with what distant coldness, what insulting neglect, I behaved towards her afterwards. She must have supposed, as indeed I intended she should do, that she was indifferent to me; yet all this time I was secretly as much attached to her as ever.

"At length I had accustomed myself so entirely to shun her society, that on the morning of the party to Richmond I actually invented a clumsy excuse for remaining in town when I found that Miss Mordaunt was to take Caroline's place during that excursion; and, in the evening, I did not visit Mary at the opera, because I saw that her beautiful friend was with her in her box.

"After the performance was over, I met them both in the passage: Augusta was leaning upon Stafford's arm;—he was talking to

her very earnestly and happily, and one glance at their countenances persuaded me that he had proposed to her and had been accepted. This was a misfortune I had long looked forward to as inevitable. I had myself paved the way to it by keeping out of my rival's path; yet I was almost stunned by the sudden conviction that the event which was to separate me for life from the object of my affections was actually decided upon!

"I attempted to leave the Opera-house immediately; but the crowd was so great that I could not speedily succeed in making my escape. I had just got out into the street, when I heard a piercing shriek of distress; and an instant afterwards Augusta herself rushed past me, alone, and with her gown in flames! I contrived to rescue her from danger; and, at Mary's particular request, I stayed with them until she was in some degree restored to her recollection.

"It was during this interval that I discovered from several unguarded expressions which she uttered, and also from involuntary circumstances in her manner, that while Augusta felt a strong secret contempt and dislike for the man she had just consented to swear at the altar to honour and obey, she still cherished sentiments of a very different nature towards

the ill-fated and unworthy admirer, who had been induced to relinquish his chance of obtaining her hand, and had long ago madly forfeited all claim to her regard.

"Oh, God! I can never forget the agony of that moment! It was impossible — it would have been barbarous to leave her in her then helpless state; yet I dared not trust myself to remain very near her, lest a sudden movement, or even a sigh, might inform her of my presence, or betray to her who I was. I felt that it was entirely my own folly which had brought upon me the anguish and misery which I now endured. I knew that I had no right to disturb, or to complain of, the engagement between Stafford and Miss Mordaunt. Yet I saw that she already repented having contracted it; and I could not help bitterly accusing myself of having not only been instrumental in favouring my rival's views, but also of having finally goaded and provoked her into accepting a husband whom she detested. I completely forgot all her faults, all her follies, while the recollection of my own sins started up before me; and I looked upon her as an injured angel.

"I passed a wretched and a sleepless night; and early the next morning I sent my servant to Mr. Mordaunt's, to inquire how Augusta

was. He brought back a very cold message of thanks from her father, accompanied by a painfully indifferent report of her health. I confess that this treatment both hurt and mortified me. I had involuntarily cherished a vague hope that, after what had occurred at the opera, the marriage with Stafford might have been broken off; but in the course of the afternoon I heard from more than one authority that it had been regularly announced.

"My fate was now irrevocable! I feared that Augusta could not be happy in her married life; and I was determined to conceal from her an attachment which had proved most unfortunate to us both. I hurried down to D'Arcy, and shut myself up from all mankind, until my solitude was unexpectedly broken in upon by Charles Mordaunt.

"I do not doubt that you have heard an account of his visit, though he did not probably describe to you one half of the kindness he showed for me.

"The keenest pang I suffered from my disappointment arose from a persuasion that if Augusta could retain any preference for me after the manner in which I had behaved to her, I might surely, had I acted differently, have succeeded in securing her affections. The

sight of Charles renewed all my vain regrets. He informed me he was going to Mordaunt to be present at his sister's wedding; and even then he admitted that he did not much fancy his future brother-in-law, and that he should have been better pleased if *I* had happened to have been the intended bridegroom. He little knew the pain he inflicted upon me by this flattering observation. He had spoken with the most unreserved confidence, but I found myself unable to open my whole mind to him in return; I could not tell him I had undervalued the sister he was so justly proud of, and had systematically shunned her society. I therefore merely thanked him for the high compliment he had paid me; but assured him that, much as I admired Miss Mordaunt, I believed that her character and mine were very ill suited to each other.

"Charles wrote me word that his sister's marriage was entirely at an end; and then, indeed, wild hopes suggested themselves very speedily to my imagination: yet, in truth, Agnes, deeply as I was still in love with her, it did often occur to me to doubt, if I had originally been the object of her choice—whether she would, after all, have made me really happy."

When first I was acquainted with Au-

gusta," replied his cousin, "I confess that I did not think her quite worthy of you."

Lord Delmore half turned away his head in anger or impatience; but Lady Agnes calmly continued,—

"It was impossible not to admire her; but there was at that time much to regret, much to censure in her conduct. She is become a very different person now: her failings have disappeared, and her amiable qualities have been brought out with additional lustre. I am convinced that no two individuals were ever better calculated to render each other mutually happy than you and Augusta Mordaunt; and I flatter myself that all past misunderstandings will at length be cleared up between you."

Lionel shook his head mournfully; and Lady Agnes proceeded to describe to him the depression which had preyed upon Augusta's spirits after her quarrel with Mr. Stafford, and the beneficial effects which had subsequently resulted from her friendship with Miss Stanley. She spoke of her in terms of warm affection; yet the praises she bestowed upon her were not exaggerated,—in short, she represented her as she really was; and her auditor listened to all her commendations with the most intense interest.

"And do you think," said he, "I may ven-

me to indulge a hope that your charming friend will ever forgive me?—that she will be persuaded to forget the provocation she has received, and to look with favourable eyes upon one who so little deserves her pardon?"

"I cannot promise you that she will," answered Lady Agnes; "yet, in my opinion, you have no cause to despair of her doing so. I know indeed that she once expressed great indignation against you to her brother, and even exacted from him an agreement that he would never mention your name to her again; but this was just after her rupture with Mr. Stafford, and at a moment when her feelings were of course much excited. Since then they have become calmed and subdued, and her whole character has undergone a complete change."

"Have you heard," inquired Lord Delmore, "where Stafford is gone, and what he has been doing with himself lately?"

"He went, I believe, in the first instance to London; but I can give you no further intelligence of his proceedings."

"They are of little consequence to me now," continued Lionel, in a careless voice; "I scarcely know why I asked you that question. As soon as I learned that his engagement to Miss Mordaunt had been broken off, my interest for him

subsided again into contempt. We stand at present upon the same terms as formerly—all old scores are wiped out between us. I gave him a fair field once, and he was accepted;—he has thrown away his advantage, and it is now my turn to try if I cannot succeed in gaining the prize *he* has failed to carry away. But it is wasting our time to talk of Stafford: you must advise me, Agnes, how to act towards the Mordaunts. *Par exemple*, how am I to open a communication with them?"

Lady Agnes suggested that he might call at Mordaunt: but this, considering all circumstances, he did not think that he could presume to do.

She then proposed that she should herself go over there the next day, and mention to Mrs. Mordaunt and Augusta, in the course of conversation, "that her cousin Lord Delmore was staying at Estonville, and that she had heard him say he was extremely anxious to have the pleasure of renewing his acquaintance with them."

Lionel was much pleased with this idea; and he told his cousin, "that if the hopes which now began faintly to dawn upon him should ultimately be crowned with success, he should always gratefully feel that he owed that success entirely to her kind mediation."

CHAPTER XI.

Olivia.—For him, I think not on him: for his thoughts,
Would they were blanks, rather than fill'd with me!
Viola.—Madam, I come to whet your gentle thoughts
On his behalf:—
Olivia.— Oh, by your leave, I pray you;
I bade you never speak again of him.

SHAKSPEARE.

LADY CAROLINE MORTIMER did not make her appearance at breakfast the following morning; Lady Mary Carrington pleaded a bad night, and the continuance of her headache, as excuses for her sister's absence; but soon after the meal was concluded, the invalid sent a message to Lord Delmore, to beg that he would come and speak to her in her dressing-room. He immediately obeyed the summons, wondering, as he went, what new artifice his dangerous cousin had been devising to mislead him, and resolving not again to allow himself to be made her dupe.

When he entered the little apartment where she was sitting, and from which the daylight had been partially excluded, he was really shocked to see her. Her whole appearance bore strong evidence of mental and bodily suffering; her dress seemed to have been less attended to than usual, and everything around her wore the untidy air of genuine neglect, rather than the semblance of having been intentionally disarranged.

Lady Caroline made Lord Delmore a sign to sit down.

"I could not rest satisfied, Lionel," she said in a faint voice, "until I had attempted to express to you how much I feel ashamed of myself for my unworthy conduct. It renders me perfectly miserable to see how deeply you despise me; and it humbles me in the dust to acknowledge how justly I have merited that you should do so. You know what a proud spirit mine is; and you may well imagine that before I could bow it to this confession, I have had a severe conflict with myself. My affection for you has, however, proved stronger than my pride; and with the hope of reinstating myself in your good opinion, I am willing to make you any reparation you can require of me, and to endeavour if possible to counteract

any mischief which my former misrepresentations may have occasioned."

She paused; and Lord Delmore's anger was so completely disarmed when he saw the pitiable condition to which his haughty cousin was reduced, that the just indignation he had felt against her was speedily changed into compassion.

"I am not hard-hearted or revengeful enough," replied he kindly, "to refuse you the reconciliation you have condescended to sue for. Caroline, I forgive you very sincerely." And he held out his hand towards her as he spoke.

Lady Caroline seized it affectionately, pressed it to her lips, and burst into tears. Both remained silent for some moments. At length Lord Delmore said,

"You talked of reparation just now. Alas! I fear you would not be able to prevail upon the unoffending girl whom you induced me to treat so injuriously last spring, to pardon *me* as easily as I have pardoned you."

"And why should I not?" exclaimed Lady Caroline: "unless you think her character more implacable than your own. The provocation you gave *her* was not half so cruel as that which you received at my hands; and *I*

am forgiven. I dare not venture to offer you my counsel; but if I were in your place, I would go over to Mordaunt immediately, implore Augusta to grant me a private conference, and tell her the whole truth,—spare nobody, and conceal nothing. I am very much mistaken if she would not too thankfully listen to such an explanation."

Lionel looked steadily at his cousin for an instant.

"Caroline," observed he, "you always were extreme in good or ill; with all your faults, you never were like other people. I will not judge so harshly of you as to suppose it possible that you intend to betray me into any snare. I believe that you have now spoken generously and sincerely, and I feel very much disposed to follow your advice."

"Oh, do, I beseech you!" cried Lady Caroline: "you will hereafter find no reason to repent having taken such a course. The physician who has administered a poison, best knows how to prescribe the antidote. Ride over to Mordaunt this very morning—you cannot go there too soon; and if you can tell me when you come back that you have made your peace with Augusta, I shall at least be no longer unable to look in your face."

At this moment Lady Agnes came into the room to inquire how her sister did.

"I have been better, thank you," said Lady Caroline, "during the last quarter of an hour; but I still *feel* a sad wretch, and I am sure that I must *look* one. You intend to sit with me a little while, I hope, to help me to scare away the *blue spirits*? Your arrival, too, will opportunely relieve poor Lionel, who has, you see, been charitable enough to visit the sick lady, and who now wishes to go out riding." And after Lord Delmore had bade her adieu, she continued,—"I have been talking rather more than was quite good for me, and I am fatigued: should you have any objection to read me a chapter or two of the novel you will find upon the table? It would be doing me a great kindness: the story interested me extremely, and I had not time to finish it yesterday."

Lady Agnes prepared to comply with this request; but she could not help considering her sister's unusually gracious manner towards her a little suspicious, and thinking it rather strange that a person with a bad headache should desire to hear anything read aloud. In fact, she soon perceived that Lady Caroline did not pay the slightest attention to the book; her ideas evidently wandered to other subjects; yet

she seemed determined to be in no hurry to release *her* from the task she had imposed upon her.

At length Lady Mary joined them. "You must go down-stairs directly, Agnes," she observed, "and pay your dutiful respects, like a good girl, to your future papa, Mr. Mordaunt."

"Is Mr. Mordaunt here?"

"Yes; he happened to hear that Lionel was with us, so he came to express his gratitude to him for having saved his daughter's life,—at least, I suppose so. He could scarcely do less; —and it is curious enough, that I who witnessed the accident should also have been present at this interesting meeting between the two parties who were so deeply concerned in it."

Lady Agnes did not wait to hear any more of these amiable remarks. As soon as she had closed the door, Lady Mary exclaimed,

"Well, Caroline, you certainly deserve great credit for having so cleverly contrived to keep our good sister out of mischief this morning! I should not even now have interrupted your *lecture*, had not Mr. Mordaunt professed such warm affection for Agnes, that nothing would have persuaded him to go away without seeing her. But Lionel has been with you, and I am

dying with impatience to know the result of your interview."

"It ended," replied Lady Caroline, in a melancholy tone, "both better and worse than I had expected. I found little difficulty in convincing him of my penitence, and, consequently, in prevailing upon him to pardon my offences. But I had the mortification of discovering that he is still so devotedly attached to Augusta, that if he fails in persuading *her* to marry him, no earthly power will ever induce him to marry anybody else."

"You are not seriously afraid that Augusta will accept Lionel, are you?" asked Lady Mary.

"I hope that she will not,—and yet I do not quite know what to think about it; the fate of that question is at this moment trembling in the balance, and a hair would turn the scale. My circumstances are so desperate, that I have boldly hazarded a very desperate measure. I have recommended Lionel to throw himself at the feet of his beloved,—I have urged him to proceed to Mordaunt for that purpose without an hour's delay,—I have encouraged him to hope that she will listen favourably to his suit; and if Mr. Mordaunt had not provokingly made his appearance here, Delmore would probably by

this time have been half-way upon a fool's errand."

"Since Lionel and Augusta *must* meet," observed Lady Mary, "it is undoubtedly desirable that they should do so as soon as possible, and not as indifferent acquaintance."

"To be sure it is, upon every account," answered her sister sharply. "If I had not felt convinced of *that*, I would not have risked the dangerous plan I have adopted. Augusta despises Delmore's character, but she loves him; and could he as her brother's friend contrive to be frequently in her society, or could their mutual friend Agnes have time to influence her in his favour before he entered into any explanation of his sentiments with her, we may easily guess what would become of her scruples and her cruelty. On the contrary, should he startle her by making at once an apology for his past conduct and a declaration of his present affection, it is much more than probable that she would decidedly refuse him. Such a repulse would naturally surprise and mortify him, and would most likely prove too galling to his pride to allow him ever to dream of renewing his solicitations to Miss Mordaunt. At any rate, when he has seen—when he has spoken to Augusta, I shall know the worst, and

shall be no longer tortured by the dreadful uncertainty I now endure. Until that decisive conference is over, I must continue to writhe under an agony of apprehension too horrible to be described."

Lady Mary begged her sister to endeavour to calm her excited feelings.

"You are destroying yourself," she said: "you are materially injuring both your health and your appearance by giving way in this manner to your grief and to your fears. Let me beseech you to be more composed."

"I will be calm enough," replied Lady Caroline, "when I come down-stairs; I will be as firm as you can wish me when I know my fate; but in the mean while I *must* give free indulgence to my anguish when I am alone, or my heart would burst. You talk to me of composure, and you might as well speak of ease to a criminal upon the rack."

Her ladyship did, however, make an effort to subdue her unruly passions; and she succeeded. She did not leave her dressing-room until late in the afternoon, and then she seemed to be still oppressed with languor. Nobody who saw her that day doubted from her looks that her health had been really affected, or suspected from her manner that mental distress had been the cause of her indisposition.

When Lady Agnes joined the party in the library, she found Lord Delmore and Mr. Mordaunt deeply engaged in conversation, and apparently upon very friendly terms. The latter greeted her with *empressement;* told her he had several long messages for her from Mrs. Mordaunt, and that he had brought her a *billet doux* from Augusta.

"Pray be good enough to give my best love to the latter," she said, "and tell her I have not time to write to her this morning. But," added she after a pause, "I think I will trouble you to carry a few lines for me to Mrs. Mordaunt."

She retired immediately to a writing-table and penned the following note:—

"Dear Mrs. Mordaunt,

"Lord Delmore proposes himself the pleasure of calling at Mordaunt to-morrow, and if the weather is fine I intend to accompany him in his ride. I give you this notice of our approach, in hopes of having a better chance of finding you and dear Augusta at home; and, considering who is to be my companion, I judged it more prudent to make my communication to *you* than to my usual correspondent.

"Believe me ever, yours affectionately,

"Agnes Mortimer."

Mrs. Mordaunt was much pleased with this note, and still more with the information it contained. She saw that it was intended to give her to understand that Lord Delmore wished to renew his attentions to her daughter, and that his cousin was desirous to befriend his cause; and she was extremely gratified by the propriety of her conduct in having in the first instance made this known to *her*. She talked the subject over with Mr. Mordaunt, and they agreed that it would be highly expedient to encourage those advances which Lord Delmore was inclined to make towards a renewal of friendship.

"His lordship is rather a slippery youth to deal with," observed Mr. Mordaunt, "as we have already found by experience; but should he be induced to commit himself so far as to propose for Augusta, I do not imagine we should have the same difficulty in keeping her up to her engagement to *him*, that we had in the case of our poor friend Stafford."

Mrs. Mordaunt did not tell her daughter that she would see Lord Delmore the next day, but she contrived to speak of him before her; and she remarked that Augusta listened with intense interest to her father's description of

his visit to Estonville; and that she changed colour, and looked much agitated, when she heard him mention the intention Lionel had expressed of calling upon them before he left the neighbourhood.

The following morning, Miss Mordaunt asked her mother if she should have any objection to her walking to the Rectory to spend the afternoon with the Miss Stanleys?

"I think you had better put off your walk till to-morrow," said Mrs. Mordaunt. "The day seems rather threatening; and, in short, I should prefer your remaining at home."

Augusta immediately gave up the point, and took out a piece of embroidery; but she tried in vain to fix her attention upon her work—she put the wrong shades into all the flowers, and shaped them unlike her pattern.

Mrs. Mordaunt affected to employ herself also. She was seated near the window; and at length she exclaimed,

"There are figures on horseback coming across the park; and though they are still at a considerable distance, the two foremost of them look very like Agnes Mortimer and Lord Delmore."

Augusta threw aside her embroidery, and

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"But I really must

serious tone, "attempted to plead to you in my cousin's behalf; though I believe you are aware he is one of the persons far dearest to me upon earth. I trust—I feel sure that you will not refuse to listen to me now, when I earnestly beseech you to think kindly and favourably of him for my sake. He may have been misled—he may have behaved unworthily; but he has deeply and sincerely repented his past errors; and if you knew everything, you would acknowledge that there is much excuse to be made for him. You are, I hope, convinced that no consideration in the world would induce *me* to deceive you; you may therefore depend upon the truth of what I tell you, when I say that Lionel's character, though not faultless, is in all essential respects most estimable and amiable. He has been to me as a brother from my earliest infancy,—his sorrows and his secrets have all been confided to me; and *I* am consequently much better acquainted with his real merits, and with the peculiar circumstances which have influenced his conduct through life, than anybody else can possibly be."

Augusta heard every word of this vindication with fixed attention. She did not seem to have expected it; and though her countenance

betrayed no violent emotion, it assumed an expression of speechless distress which it was really painful to witness.

"My dearest Agnes," she replied, "as your friend, and as my brother's, I am willing to feel as much esteem for Lord Delmore as you can desire me to do; and, as the preserver of my own life, I should be most ungrateful if I were not very ready to believe all the just praises you can bestow upon him. God knows how sincerely, how fervently, I wish him well! But I have long been convinced that my own peace of mind will be best promoted by endeavouring to meet him as seldom as possible."

There was an impressive solemnity in Augusta's manner while she pronounced these words, which made Lady Agnes feel that it was quite out of the question to urge her farther. Mrs. Mordaunt perceived her visitor's look of disappointment, and guessed that her conversation with her daughter was taking an unfortunate turn.

"Agnes," said she aloud, "Augusta must excuse the interruption,—but I am anxious to show you some patterns of furniture which I have just received from London."

Lady Agnes got up to examine the little specimens of chintz which were taken for her

inspection out of a work-box placed upon a table at the other end of the room; and Lord Delmore ventured to obtain possession of the seat she had before occupied beside Augusta.

Miss Mordaunt was the first who spoke.

"Lord Delmore," observed she in a calm voice, "I am very glad to see you once again, since it gives me an opportunity of personally expressing the gratitude I must always feel to you for having saved me from a dreadful death."

"Oh, pray never say another word to me upon that subject!" answered Lionel. "It was the greatest happiness to myself to be able in any way to be of use to you; and I assure you that I look upon the chance of my having happened to be the person nearest to you at the instant of your alarm as the most fortunate circumstance of my whole life." He paused for a moment or two, and then continued,—"I am conscious you must think me a very wayward, unaccountable character,—alike unworthy of your notice and your esteem: and such indeed I confess that I have been. But my eyes are at length opened to my own folly; and it is my most earnest desire—my firmest determination, to endeavour by my future conduct to atone for my former misguided weakness.

May I venture to indulge a hope that I have not irretrievably forfeited your regard?"

"I rejoice very sincerely," replied Augusta, "to hear that you have formed such excellent resolutions, and I confidently trust you will have strength of mind to act up to them. You must forgive me, my lord, for the freedom with which I now speak to you, and which the unreserved nature of your own confession could alone have emboldened me to assume. I admit having perceived—and it was with pain and regret—that you have not hitherto done justice to yourself. I always imagined that your only failing was a want of sufficient firmness; and to this I believed that all your errors and misfortunes were to be attributed. If experience has shown you that I judged correctly, and has taught you the necessity of acquiring more stability of conduct, there can be no doubt of your now becoming everything that your friends can wish to see you. I trust you will always permit me to consider myself one of that number; and you must also allow me to assure you how very much gratified I feel by the kind value you have expressed for my good opinion."

Augusta's voice trembled as she pronounced these last words. Before Lord Delmore could

return her any answer, Mr. Mordaunt unfortunately joined the party, and the conversation of course became general.

Lionel was vexed and mortified. He had condemned himself without scruple, yet he was more than half inclined to be angry with Miss Mordaunt for having so fully agreed that he had been deserving of blame; and, although her censure had been qualified by more commendation than he fancied he quite merited, he was dissatisfied with her, because he thought her manner towards him very cold and distant. He was tormented, too, by a suspicion that she despised him for the weakness she had lamented.

He was resolved, however, not to relinquish his chance of making a more favourable impression upon her during a second interview; and when his visit was drawing towards a conclusion, he told Mr. Mordaunt, "that he intended to stay a very short time at Estonville; but that, as he had formerly been kind enough to ask him to Mordaunt, he felt much tempted to propose to have the pleasure of spending one day with him before he proceeded to the North."

It is unnecessary to say, that this offer was very graciously accepted by the person to

whom it was made. Mrs. Mordaunt too, after expressing to the young peer her own satisfaction at the prospect of his becoming her guest, observed, "that Edward (who was now absent for a few days) would be delighted to see him, and would have been greatly disappointed if he had quitted the neighbourhood without his doing so."

Lord Delmere looked at Augusta: she coloured, and appeared confused; but she did not speak a single word.

After her father entered the room, Miss Mordaunt had carefully avoided giving Lionel any further opportunity of talking to her unheard by others; yet, just before his departure, she contrived to lead Lady Agnes towards the window.

"Pray sit down here for an instant," she said to her in a whisper; "I *must* speak to you in confidence; I have something upon my mind, and I cannot let you go away until I have explained to you what it is. I am placed in strange and distressing circumstances; I have no time to enter into particulars, or to frame an introduction to the communication I am about to make to you; so I must come to the point at once. Oh, Agnes! I cannot help understanding the purpose of your cousin's visits

to Mordaunt; and I shall consider it a great kindness, if you will, in the most delicate manner possible, inform Lord Delmore from me before I see him again, that these painful meetings can only end in disappointment."

"And why should they do so?" replied Lady Agnes earnestly. "You like Lionel—I am persuaded that you have always liked him; and whatever suspicions you may have formerly entertained about his sentiments towards you, you can no longer have any doubt of the warmth and sincerity of his attachment for you."

"Do not tell me of this—do not mention it again," exclaimed Augusta in an agitated voice, "unless you wish to break my heart! I perceive that it is so," she added in a calmer tone, "and I am truly grieved to see it. You will, I trust, do me the justice to believe that I am neither actuated by caprice, nor by any paltry feeling of offended vanity; yet it is perhaps right that I should give you a reason for my conduct; and when you have heard it, you will, I think, agree with me that it is an unanswerable one. My opinion of Lord Delmore's character, in spite of all its excellences, is such, that I feel I could not conscientiously reverence him as a husband,—that I could not safely

trust him as the guardian of my happiness. In my giddy, thoughtless days, I was rash enough to accept a person I had never liked; but even then I disdained to fulfil my engagement, when I found that he was totally unworthy of my esteem. I do not pretend to say that Lord Delmore was ever indifferent to me—that to love him would be a difficult task; yet, as it would be out of my power to respect and honour him at the same time, I now feel that I ought not—that it would be against my principles, to marry him. It is the consciousness of my preference towards him which renders me afraid to listen to his arguments, and which induces me to request *you* to communicate to him my decision, instead of announcing it to him myself."

"I will certainly perform this unwelcome office," answered Lady Agnes, "since you so positively require me to undertake it. It would be unkind, as well as useless, to argue with you upon a determination which I most deeply regret, and which I am still inclined to imagine has been caused by some unfortunate misapprehension. I am very willing to admit that poor Lionel's conduct has been extremely blameable; but it strikes me that you have judged him very harshly, and that he has done nothing

which need degrade him in your estimation for the rest of his life."

"You force me to tell you the truth," said Augusta, "and you will be vexed and angry with me when you hear it. There is one incurable vice for which I have always felt so insurmountable a horror, that I have resolved no inducement should persuade me to connect myself with any person who has ever been addicted to it;—I mean the vice of gaming. You cannot be ignorant that your cousin formerly staked and lost a very large sum of money at play?"

"I am too well acquainted with every circumstance of that unfortunate history; I never can forget the anguish of mind Lionel then suffered, or the touching sincerity of his remorse;—your brother can also bear testimony to this: but I am convinced that the friend who watched over him like his guardian angel during the earliest hours of his distress, would not have acted so base a part as to publish his errors even to his own family. I suspect it is to my sister Caroline that you are indebted for your information upon a subject which ought in charity to have remained buried in oblivion. When she told you the particulars of Lionel's

first serious misdeed, I hope she had the candour to add how faithfully and scrupulously he has adhered to the resolution he formed immediately after he committed it,—of keeping out of the way of being concerned in anything that could have the appearance of a gambling transaction."

Augusta fixed her eyes for a moment upon Lady Agnes's countenance. "She is not aware," thought she, "of her beloved cousin's last transgression; and I would not disclose it to her for worlds, even if I were at liberty to do so."

"I can believe," she observed aloud, "that this fatal secret was confided to me with no friendly intention; yet still it is too true; and as I happen to be possessed of it, I could not feel any security that Lord Delmore's good determinations might not in some future hour of temptation give way a second time. You will, of course, conceal from him my having mentioned to you my knowledge of his former unhappy propensity for play; as it would distress me beyond expression unnecessarily to wound his feelings, or to revive in his mind a single pang of remorse. But our conference has already lasted longer than it should have done," said she, rising from her chair. "Dearest Agnes, if

my words have offended you, you will, I am sure, forgive and pity me."

Lady Agnes pressed her friend's hand very affectionately; and then turning towards Lord Delmore, she remarked,

"We must make the best of our way home, Lionel; the days now close in very early, and I suspect that time has flown rapidly since we have been here."

After they had bid adieu to the inmates of Mordaunt, the two cousins rode on a considerable way in silence: they felt a mutual reluctance to enter upon the subject which was painfully engrossing their thoughts; but at length Lord Delmore said,

"I am almost afraid to ask you, Agnes, what you and Augusta were talking about so earnestly just now. I fancied that your conversation related to *me;* and as you have not yet repeated any part of it, I know too well that it must have been very decidedly unfavourable to my hopes."

"Alas!" replied Lady Agnes, "I cannot deny that both your conjectures are truly founded, and also that a very distressing commission has been entrusted to me."

She then proceeded to break to Lionel as gently as possible all that Augusta had re-

quested her to tell him; carefully abstaining from making any allusion to the circumstance which formed the alleged bar to his ever being entirely reinstated in her esteem.

"I am not surprised at this," observed Lionel, in a dejected tone. "When we set out from Estonville, I had very faint hopes of meeting with a gracious reception from Miss Mordaunt; and the instant I saw her, I discovered that she despised me. From the hour of my birth it has been my fate to be unhappy, and to endure one bitter disappointment after another. In the present instance my mortification has been brought upon me by my own folly, and that makes it the harder to bear. At any rate, I am glad that I did not give up my last chance of reversing my luckless destiny without attempting once more to soften a heart which seems almost unnaturally hardened against me. The trial has been made; the struggle is over; and I must now endeavour to reconcile myself with the best grace I can command to the cheerless, solitary prospect that lies before me. My first embarrassment is to know how to excuse myself from fulfilling my proffered engagement at Mordaunt without offending Mr. Mordaunt."

"If you take my advice," continued his

cousin, "you will still make your visit there. It will only last for a few hours; and as you must in future meet Augusta in society, it will be less awkward for both of you, when you happen to do so, if you have previously seen each other again. Any apology you could send to Mr. Mordaunt would place your conduct in a very extraordinary and unworthy light. It would also betray to Caroline that you have been rejected by his daughter; which is a circumstance it is by no means either necessary or desirable that she should be able exactly to ascertain. I have not any scruple in asserting my belief that *she* has been the instrument of depriving you of Augusta's regard; and therefore, were I in your place, I should not gratify her by telling her what has passed to-day, or allowing her to find out how completely her artful measures have succeeded."

Lionel acquiesced in the wisdom of all these suggestions, and promised to act in every respect as Lady Agnes had recommended him.

When they reached Estonville, they found several people assembled in the hall: it was too dusk for billiards, and they were talking round the huge Christmas fire. Lady Caroline, muffled as an invalid in a cap and shawl, was

sitting with her feet upon the fender, and apparently joining with wild gaiety in the general conversation. She stopped for an instant when her sister and Lord Delmore came in, and fixed her eyes upon the countenances of both with feverish and penetrating anxiety. She was too good a physiognomist not to feel satisfied by one glance that Lionel's visit had proved unpropitious; and she immediately took up again the broken thread of her discourse, and continued holding forth to her admiring audience with increased animation.

Lord Delmore was very little inclined to attend to indifferent discussions: he soon made his escape from the gay society in the hall, and shut himself up in his own room till dinner. In the evening he seemed much disposed to avoid Lady Caroline, and for some time she appeared very willing to allow him to do so; but at length she adroitly seized an opportunity of engaging him in a *tête-à-tête*.

"I have, long been watching," she began, "for a favourable moment to speak to you apart. You have been at Mordaunt?"—and she paused, and looked inquiringly in his face, as if in eager expectation that he would give her an account of all that had transpired there

I *have* been at Mordaunt," answered Lionel calmly, "and I am going there again next Thursday."

Lady Caroline started violently, grew pale as death, and grasped the end of the sofa to support herself from falling. She made a desperate effort, however, to recover her composure, and remarked with tolerable firmness,

"Then I need not ask you if your ride was an agreeable one. You have, I trust, succeeded in justifying yourself completely in Augusta's estimation?"

"I have endeavoured to act as you advised me yesterday," replied Lord Delmore. "But we will, if you please, change the topic of our discourse. You know it was always my nature to be unconfiding and *sauvage;* and I confess that I feel just at present in no humour to communicate my hopes or my fears even to *you*."

"I own I have deserved this reproof," said Lady Caroline meekly, "yet I did not quite expect it!" And bursting into tears, she started up from the sofa and hurried out of the room.

Her exit was so sudden, that Lionel had no time to attempt to stop her: he was sorry to have distressed her, and after she was gone he

reproached himself for having spoken to her too harshly, and determined to make amends for this by treating her with more kindness in future.

A few moments' reflection in the solitude of her own dressing-room convinced Lady Caroline that although her cousin might intend to go back to Mordaunt, he could not have left his affairs there in a very happy train; and led her to imagine that his next interview with Augusta would probably terminate by his receiving a decided negative to his suit.

This view of the case restored her spirits to the same strange state of excitement they had been wrought up to before they were overset by the last alarming shock; and enabled her very soon to rejoin the party she had left downstairs, without betraying any visible alteration of appearance or manner.

Meanwhile poor Augusta Mordaunt felt scarcely less unhappy than Lord Delmore. There was a severe struggle in her mind between her sense of what she believed to be right, and her revived attachment for her earliest admirer. She was, indeed, supported by the consciousness of having done her duty in resolutely refusing to listen to the addresses of

a fascinating but dishonourable gambler; yet it grieved her very deeply to think of the mortification she knew she must have inflicted upon a person who was very dear to her in spite of all his faults; and she could not help apprehending that the disappointment he had just met with might have the fatal effect of either plunging him into settled despondency, or driving him, from mere desperation, to resort again to his former ruinous practices.

She saw that her mother was desirous to encourage Lionel's attentions, and she felt that she ought to make known to her the decisive measure she had already taken to put a stop to them. The promise of secrecy she had given to Lady Caroline Mortimer made such an explanation very difficult; and as she deemed it probable that Lord Delmore might excuse himself from coming again to Mordaunt, she fancied there could be no great harm in her delaying her intended confession until after he had left the country.

CHAPTER XII.

So firm, though gentle, was her look,
Hope i' the instant fled:
A solemn, dear farewell he took,
And from her presence sped.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

NONE of the Mordaunt family heard any intelligence of Lord Delmore during the interval between his morning visit and the day on which he had fixed to come and stay with them; it seemed therefore quite certain that he meant to keep his engagement.

Edward observed to his sister with an incredulous smile, "that she might disclaim him as often as she pleased, but that he must still persist in considering the young peer as peculiarly *her* guest; and that, scornful as she pretended to be, he had no doubt she would relent, and make herself very agreeable to him when he arrived."

Mrs. Mordaunt's manner was unusually fussy on the day of Lionel's approach. She was anxious that her daughter should look well; that her house should appear comfortable, — and, in short, that everything should wear a pre-

possessing aspect in the eyes of her noble visitor; and she fidgeted about from one room to another in a state of nervous, but happy and important agitation.

Augusta, on the contrary, was silent, thoughtful, and abstracted. She looked forward with much apprehension to the painful hours she was soon to spend in Lord Delmore's society; and it was a great relief to her, that in consequence of her mother's numerous occupations, she was left during a considerable part of the morning to sit alone.

She strove to arm herself with firmness to meet the arduous trial that was before her; and to prepare herself to go through with unshaken courage the difficult part she was aware that she should have to sustain. She never wavered for an instant in her resolution; she felt that her fortitude would not desert her when it was put to the test: yet, as the period of Lionel's arrival drew nearer and nearer, her uneasiness at the thoughts of seeing him became more and more oppressive.

The day wore on;—Mr. Mordaunt and Edward came in from their ride: Mrs. Mordaunt put away her work, and Augusta brought her chair closer to the bright fire that blazed in the well-filled grate. The weather had suddenly

grown piercingly cold, and a driving sort of sleet was beginning to beat against the windows.

Mrs. Mordaunt surveyed her daughter's dress, to assure herself that her toilet had been suitable for the occasion; but she made no observation upon it. She then turned her eyes from her own comfortable fireside, towards the dreary prospect that presented itself out of doors; and remarked, "that as she believed Lord Delmore generally travelled in a britzka, she feared he would have a very unpleasant drive."

"Yes," replied Mr. Mordaunt, "I do not much envy him; but I dare say he is provided with plenty of good great-coats and travelling-cloaks to keep him warm."

Augusta remained silent; she did not wish to admit that she had previously *felt* the same sort of concern about Lionel's discomfort which her mother had just *expressed*.

A quarter of an hour—half an hour—an hour passed: it had become quite dark, and nothing could be discerned through the windows but the particles of sleet which were sticking upon the glass, and which shone like silver as they were reflected by the broad light from the fire.

"Lord Delmore is very late," said Mrs. Mordaunt, who could no longer conceal the

impatience she felt for his arrival: "it seems to be a particularly dark night, — I hope his post-boy has not mistaken the road."

"There is not much fear of that," answered her husband; "he must be very ingenious if he has contrived to lose his way between Estonville Castle and this place. But our guest certainly is later than I thought he would have been."

Another pause ensued; the family party then talked of indifferent subjects. Mrs. Mordaunt rang the bell to order more coals, and her looks wandered from time to time towards the clock that stood upon the chimneypiece. The sound of the dressing-bell roused Mr. Mordaunt's attention.

"If this man intends to come here to-day," observed he, "it is very odd that he does not make his appearance. There is nothing so tiresome as expecting people;—I am bored to death with sitting waiting for him, and so are we all."

"I begin to think there must be some mistake about it," replied Mrs. Mordaunt: "are you quite sure that this is the day Lord Delmore proposed to come to us?"

"I am certain that it is," continued he rather testily; "consequently there can be no mistake. I will not venture to assert with equal confidence that his lordship may not have

changed his mind since we had the pleasure of seeing him. At all events, I shall not consider it necessary to wait dinner for him after seven o'clock."

Mrs. Mordaunt herself felt some very uncomfortable misgivings. Augusta sincerely hoped that Lionel would not now arrive; yet she could not help thinking that he would behave very unhandsomely to her father and mother, if he stayed away without having sent them any apology for doing so.

At last, after he had been completely given up by the whole party, and they had grown almost weary of wondering what had become of him, the sound of wheels was distinctly heard, and in a few minutes Lord Delmore walked into the room, "to clear up the mystery, and give an account of himself," as his host expressed it.

He was received very kindly by Augusta, and welcomed most graciously by Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt; who forgot entirely, when they saw him, the mistrust and anger they had entertained against him just before his entrance.

He looked grave and ill, and he made many hurried excuses for having been detained at Estonville till such an unseasonable hour. These were taken in very good part; and Mrs. Mor-

daunt, who fancied he must be cold after his wretched drive, insisted upon his coming to the fire and warming himself comfortably before he went to dress. She little suspected that the oppression which seemed to have benumbed all his faculties was a chill at the heart, not a temporary affection occasioned by the inclemency of the weather.

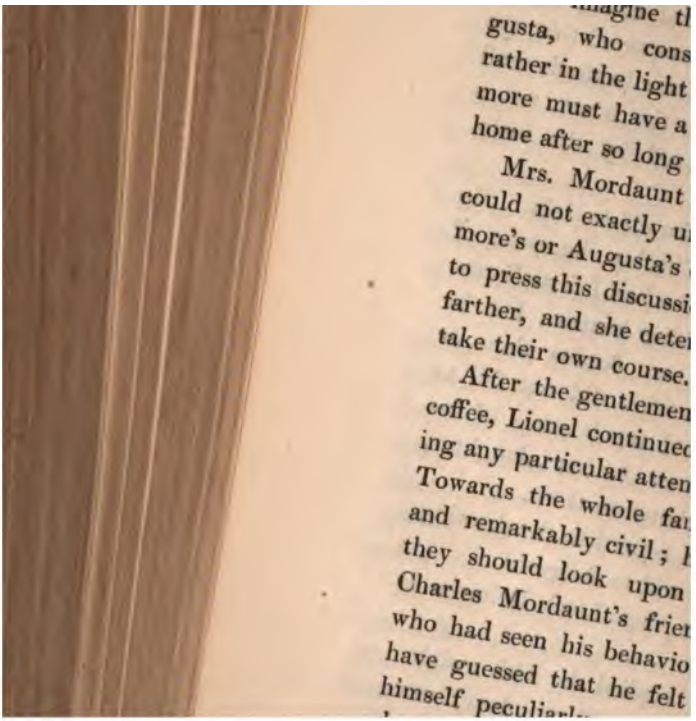
At dinner he exerted himself to talk. He inquired about his friend Charles; he spoke of his own tour, of the party he had left at Estonville, and of the approaching bazaar; but he made no allusion to his own future plans or movements. And his hostess did not fail to observe that he addressed much more of his conversation to her than to her daughter, although he was seated between them.

When the two ladies retired to the drawing-room, Mrs. Mordaunt said to Augusta,

"It appears to me that Lord Delmore is not well to-day."

"I fear he is not," replied she with a sigh.

"You must exert yourself, my love," continued her mother, "to endeavour to cheer him this evening. I wish he was not going so soon to D'Arcy; I am sure the solitude of that place cannot be good for him: it mopes him to death—as well it may. I suppose it would be impossi-



about his regret at being obliged to set out upon his long journey at a very early hour.

"I suppose it will be a good while before we see you again in this part of the world, my lord?" remarked Mr. Mordaunt.

"I am indeed afraid that we are not likely to meet very speedily," replied Lionel. "My future movements are extremely doubtful; all my prospects are just now in a state of great uncertainty. I shall perhaps go abroad, and I may very probably remain upon the Continent for several years."

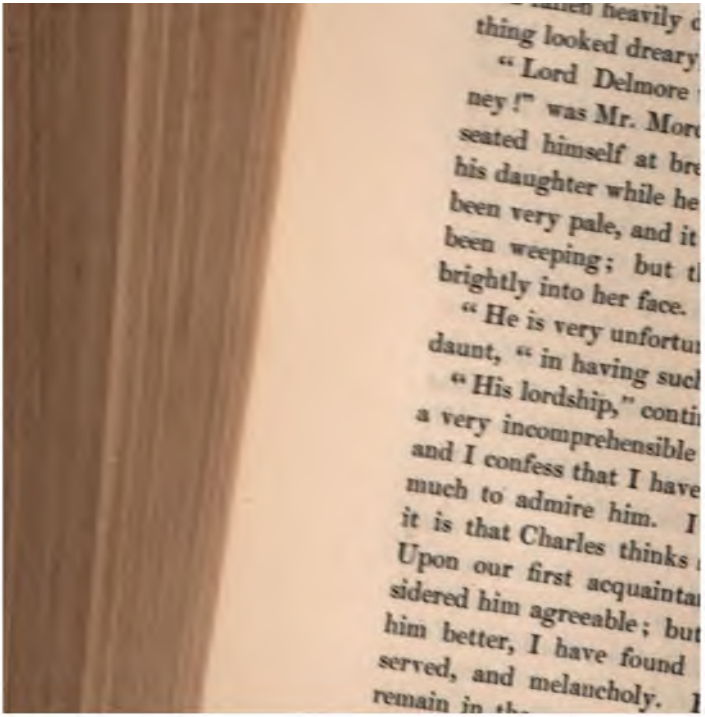
Mr. Mordaunt made no answer to this communication; but both he and Mrs. Mordaunt bade adieu to their guest rather more coldly than they had welcomed him upon his arrival.

He advanced to shake hands with Augusta, but he was unable to speak to her; and when she perceived the agitation of his manner and the woeful expression of his countenance as he raised his eyes towards hers, she felt as if her heart was going to break.

"May God bless you, Lord Delmore!" she faintly ejaculated.

Lionel turned away his head to conceal his emotion; and in an instant afterwards she had left the room.

The air was so piercingly cold the morning



to the conversation; it afterwards flagged repeatedly, and was only carried on at broken intervals; for all the party appeared unusually dull and dispirited.

"It is impossible for any body in their senses to attempt going out of the house in such a day as this," said Mr. Mordaunt, as he walked away from a window near which he had been standing for some time. "Edward," continued he, "if you have nothing else to do, we may as well play a game at billiards: it is the only exercise we can take this morning, and it will help us to kill the great enemy—Time."

Mr. Mordaunt sauntered out of the room as he concluded these words; his son followed him, and Augusta was thus left alone with her mother.

She felt it would be doing injustice to Lord Delmore if she deferred any longer explaining to Mrs. Mordaunt the real state of the case, and making known to her the terms upon which she had placed herself with their departed guest. She therefore, though with much difficulty, and after many pauses, accomplished the arduous task of giving her a minute account of every word that had been spoken by Lionel, Lady Agnes Mortimer, and herself, during the last morning the two former had been at Mordaunt.

It was very painful to her to be obliged to allude to Lord Delmore's misconduct; and, for fear of involving herself in farther difficulties, she did not dare to avow from whom she had learned it.

She told her mother that she knew she ought not to have decided upon a question of such importance without having previously consulted her about it; but she pleaded that she had been taken by surprise, and that she had thought it absolutely necessary to crush at once those hopes which she felt that she could not conscientiously encourage.

"Upon my word, Augusta," observed Mrs. Mordaunt, "I think you have behaved in a most extraordinary manner; and I cannot say that I at all approve of your conduct. You speak of your conscience, and you talk of having acted upon principle;—these are high-sounding phrases;—but it strikes me that that principle must be a very strange and fallacious one, which has induced you in the first instance to accept the offer of a man who was disagreeable to you, and which has now led you, without any sufficient reason for doing so, to decline marrying a person you admit you have always preferred to everybody else. Lord Delmore, by your own account, is not an

habitual gambler; consequently it is ridiculous to pretend that you cannot esteem him because he was once unfortunate enough to get into a bad scrape of that sort when he was very young. We live in an evil world; and as it is out of our power to reform it, we must accommodate ourselves to take things as we find them, and to make the best of it. If we set ourselves up as being better than our neighbours, we render ourselves absurd; and believe me, we give no proof either of our good sense or our good taste. Remember that perfection is not to be found upon earth; and that if you have made up your mind to reject every admirer who may present himself to you, until you have discovered a phœnix who is entirely free from all failings, you must be contented to remain an old maid to the end of your days."

"I have long thought," answered Augusta mournfully, "that such will probably be my fate; and though it is not certainly the one I should have chosen for myself, I consider it preferable to making an unhappy marriage. I know that I could not have been happy as Lord Delmore's wife."

Mrs. Mordaunt looked earnestly at her daughter. "Augusta," she said, "you cannot deceive *me:* I am sure that there must be some

stronger cause for your determination to decline an alliance with Lord Delmore than the one you have mentioned. Let me hear the whole truth; you can have no valid plea for concealing it from your mother."

Miss Mordaunt grew very red; she had not expected so direct an appeal to her sincerity. Mrs. Mordaunt's returning kindness overwhelmed her with shame and confusion; and at that moment she bitterly experienced the misery of being unable to confide all her sorrows to a parent to whom she was so tenderly and devotedly attached.

It may be doubtful if under any circumstances Augusta would have felt willing to screen herself from every appearance of blame by betraying Lionel's unpardonable weakness; but as her lips were sealed by her solemn promise to his cousin, she had no temptation to debate that point in her mind. She therefore merely replied, and it was in a faint and faltering voice,—

"Indeed, mamma, I have nothing more to tell you."

"I am very sorry to hear you say so," remarked Mrs. Mordaunt in a tone of vexation and disappointment, "both upon your own account and upon mine. For your sake, I

grieve that your headstrong folly has led you to despise the prospect of a brilliant establishment, and has prevented your forming a connexion which would have been particularly advantageous and agreeable to you and to all your family: and for myself, I lament the mortification I feel in finding that a daughter, in whom I have hitherto had so much pride, has now behaved in a manner less worthy of my approbation than I had imagined it possible she would have done. There is a thorn somewhere, and *I* may perhaps never be able to discover it; but I suspect that I know whose hand it was that planted it. I pity Lord Delmore much. He is naturally amiable; he has lately been desirous to form a plan of domestic happiness and comfort, and to settle himself respectably at D'Arcy; and it is not easy to say what effect the present disappointment of these hopes may have upon him. His vexation may drive him to contract disreputable habits, and may thus become the means of warping his character, and degrading it in his own estimation. You profess to feel a regard for him; and if he deserves that you should do so, your conduct towards him has, in my opinion, been both harsh and unkind."

This was attacking poor Augusta in the most

vulnerable point: the same sort of ideas had already more than once suggested themselves to her mind; and she now began almost to doubt if she had really done right in refusing to marry Lord Delmore.

She asked herself if it would not have been more meritorious to have become the instrument of confirming him in his good resolutions, and of restoring him to his self-esteem, than to have driven him away, out of a selfish apprehension of endangering her own future peace? And she was well disposed to persuade herself that she had been strangely mistaken in supposing it possible that she could have been unhappy in a situation which would have given her the power of securing Lionel's comfort and respectability.

These backslidings were, however, only momentary, and she exerted herself to check them with the most determined fortitude. "I will not," she thought, "allow my feelings to get the mastery over my judgment. My vanity has induced me to rate the influence I might have obtained over Lord Delmore too highly. What right have I to imagine that I could have directed him to find the straight path? or to believe that in the hour of temptation I could have prevailed upon him to keep it? No,

no; I will never regret the course that I have taken. I have acted according to what I considered to be my duty; and if it has been erroneously, I have at least the consolation of knowing that my conduct was dictated by the best intention."

Mr. Mordaunt was outrageously angry when he heard of the dismissal which Lord Delmore had received from his daughter. It is not necessary to detail all the severe things he said both to his wife and to Augusta upon the subject.

He told the latter in conclusion, "that he had only one more observation to make;—that, although she had already very ingeniously contrived to disgust and send away two excellent husbands, he gave her fair warning, that if any other eligible suitor should ever be unwise enough to solicit her hand, he should positively insist upon her accepting him, whether she liked doing so or not; and, having accepted him, he should take good care to prevent her finding a possibility of again eluding her engagement."

Edward was extremely surprised to learn from his mother all that had been communicated to her by Augusta. Mrs. Mordaunt requested him to insinuate himself into his sister's confidence, and also to find out if it was quite

impracticable to make any impression upon her mind in Lord Delmere's favour. He undertook this delicate task more willingly than hopefully, and he very soon discovered that he should not be able to execute it with success.

When he mentioned to Augusta that his mother had informed him of a circumstance which had much astonished him, he found it distressed her so deeply to speak of Lord Delmere, or of anything relating to him, that he had not the heart to torment her by continuing the discussion at that time, or to grieve her again by attempting to renew it at any future opportunity.

It was indeed a very severe aggravation of Miss Mordaunt's sorrow, to perceive how much delighted every one of her family would have been if she had consented to become Lady Delmere; and the disappointment and disapprobation her father and mother expressed at her conduct towards Lionel, gave her many a bitter pang. She strove to keep up her spirits as well as she could, and to banish all feelings of useless regret; but still she could not help being at times extremely miserable.

Dr. Stanley and his daughters had promised to dine and sleep at Mordaunt Park during the Christmas week; and Augusta felt that it

would be a great comfort to her to talk over her distresses with her kind and excellent friend Miss Stanley. She took her to her boudoir, and there briefly related to her the story of her acquaintance with Lord Delmore, from the time she first met him at Mr. Wingfield's, to the hour of his departure from her father's house. She told her every circumstance she had told Mrs. Mordaunt; and she also imparted to her that there was one occurrence, extremely dishonourable to Lionel, which she had been obliged to conceal from her mother, in consequence of a rash but solemn promise she had made to Lady Caroline Mortimer,—by whom the secret had been communicated to her.

She did not hesitate distinctly to admit, that it was her knowledge of this mysterious fact which had decided her never to agree to unite herself to Lord Delmore. And finally, she begged Miss Stanley to tell her candidly if she approved of the manner in which she had conducted herself under these trying circumstances?

Miss Stanley assured her that she did. She lamented the unfortunate engagement she had contracted with Lady Caroline; but she said that, having been prevailed upon to enter into it, she was certainly bound to keep it faithfully. She expressed much regret at Lord

Delmore's having been led to do anything sufficiently culpable to deprive him entirely of her esteem; yet she added, that as such seemed unhappily to be the case, she should have considered it extremely wrong of her if she had consented to marry him.

In short, she confirmed her in her conviction that her behaviour had been praiseworthy and meritorious. She endeavoured to strengthen her good principles,—to fortify her in all her amiable resolutions,—to encourage her by applauding the exemplary firmness of character she had shown, and to comfort and console her under her distress.

Augusta felt much supported by the force of her arguments, and greatly soothed by the kindness of her manner; and Miss Stanley had the satisfaction of thinking, when their interesting conference was over, that she had left her in a far quieter and happier frame of mind than she had found her.

"What is become of Augusta and Miss Stanley?" inquired Mr. Mordaunt, who wondered at their long absence from the rest of the party.

"I do not exactly know," replied Mrs. Mordaunt, to whom the question was addressed; "but I rather believe that they are sitting gossiping in Augusta's boudoir."

"If they have anything to say to one another, why cannot they talk just as well here? I hate these sort of closetings. Miss Stanley is a very good, excellent person; but I sometimes think that in many respects she is rather ultra-good: and I have occasionally imagined that Augusta might never have taken those absurd fancies into her head about the enormity of Lord Delmore's having once lost money at play, if our worthy neighbour had not imparted to her some of her strict and prudish notions, and taught her to expect that all the young men in the world ought to be quite as straitlaced and as correct in their conduct as pious old Dr. Stanley."

"Hush! Mr. Mordaunt, he will hear you: and, indeed, I believe that you do his daughter injustice. I wish," she added with a sigh, "that Augusta had never had a worse friend than Miss Stanley."

The entrance of the lady in question, who now came into the room alone, put an end to the discussion; and shortly afterwards all the Stanley family set out to return to the Rectory.

The Mordaunts had been duly reminded of their engagement to go and stay at Estonville during the week of the Somerton bazaar; and it may be supposed that, in the present state of her feelings, Augusta looked forward to this

sight with very little satisfaction. She dreaded the ill-natured remarks she expected Lady Caroline Mortimer to make to her; and she apprehended still more her meeting with Lady Agnes. Upon one point she found she need not have disquieted herself; for the latter studiously avoided referring to her ride to Mordaunt, and took care not even to mention her cousin Lionel's name in Augusta's presence.

Mrs. Mordaunt seized an early opportunity of talking over Lord Delmore's concerns with her future daughter-in-law: she hoped she might have been able to throw some light upon those parts of them which puzzled and perplexed her; but she discovered that Lady Agnes was not at all better informed than herself. A feeling of delicacy, of course, prevented her giving any hint of the suspicion they both secretly entertained, that it was some treacherous interference of Lady Caroline's which had occasioned the separation they mutually deplored.

Lady Caroline was now no longer considered an invalid. She declared that she had entirely recovered her unpleasant attack; but she still looked ill, and she often appeared unusually abstracted, while at other times she gave way to fits of wild and reckless gaiety.

When she ascertained that Lionel had pro-

ceeded to D'Arcy the very morning after he left Estonville, she felt a comfortable assurance that Augusta must have refused him; yet her own sentiments towards him had undergone a great change. Her pride had been so deeply wounded by the contempt he had shown for her when she betrayed at once her strong affection for him and the baseness of which she had been guilty towards her rival, and she had been so much mortified by the coldness with which he had treated her afterwards, that her former attachment for him was converted into something very like hatred. She had a malicious kind of satisfaction in reflecting, that if Lord Delmore had repaid *her* love with scorn, she had amply avenged the insult by teaching the object of his affection to despise *him* in return.

When the Mordaunts arrived at Estonville, Lady Caroline did not spring forward to welcome Augusta with her accustomed demonstrations of delight. She greeted her, as Mrs. Mordaunt thought, rather haughtily; and Lady Mary Carrington also advanced to meet her with much less *empressement* than formerly.

Instead of tormenting her afterwards by saying spiteful and galling things to her under the mask of affected friendship, Lady Caroline kept aloof from her society, and left her, as

she observed to Philip, "entirely to the good care of her *sister* Agnes."

"Yes," pursued Lady Mary, "since I understand that the last time Augusta was here she did not choose to be considered one of *nous autres*, we can none of us, I imagine, feel the least desire to court her back to our friendship now. We will allow nobody who undervalues the privilege to continue to belong to *our set*."

"To be sure we will not," replied Lady Caroline: "why should we? *La belle Auguste* has been extremely admired, and she was very much the fashion last year; but who was it that made her so? There are many other beautiful girls in the world; and when she is left to stand entirely upon her own merits, she will find that she is only Augusta Mordaunt after all."

In accordance with the spiteful plan they had formed, the two unamiable sisters continued to treat Miss Mordaunt with cold and scrupulous civility. They never invited her to join in any of their jokes; they excluded her from their favoured *coterie*, and they would not even permit their own particular friends to talk much to her.

Thus, she who had before been courted and run after—who had met with nothing but admiration wherever she appeared, now saw herself overlooked and deserted by almost every one but Lady Agnes, whose kindness and affection

towards her seemed to increase in proportion as that of other people's diminished.

Augusta had long become acquainted with the heartless character of her former friends; and her thoughts were so much engrossed by considerations of deeper interest, that she perhaps felt less keenly mortified by their behaviour than she might have done at any other moment of her life. Yet still nobody likes to be neglected, more particularly after having been accustomed to be flattered; and, in spite of all her philosophy, it must be confessed that Augusta *did* feel mortified.

Mrs. Mordaunt was outrageously so, and found great difficulty in restraining her secret indignation against Lady Caroline.

Our old acquaintance Mr. Twiston was one of the guests who were now assembled at Estonville. Lady Caroline had requested he might be invited, as she considered him a very proper person to be made a prey of at the bazaar.

He still went through the daily farce of paying his high-flown compliments, and expressing his deep devotion to her scornful ladyship; yet, wonderful to relate, he had sufficient independence of character to show the same degree of attention to Miss Mordaunt that he had always done. He perceived that she was in disgrace with the ladies at Estonville — he thought that

she was ill used; and as he was really a good-natured man, he felt sorry for her.

"I confess that *la belle Auguste* is a very dangerous, captivating person," remarked Lady Caroline one evening to her sister Lady Mary: "she steals away from me the hearts of all my admirers. It is vain to expect that any creature will condescend to look at *me* when Miss Mordaunt is present: she has now actually made a conquest of my dear, sighing, sentimental swain, Mr. Twiston. Do pray remark how prettily they are flirting together at this moment. There is no accounting for taste; but it seems to my poor judgment, that it will be rather a sinking in poetry, if she condescends to smile at last upon the poor little Twiston, after having frowned away Mr. Stafford, and even rejected Lord Delmore."

"That would indeed be a fine finale!" answered Lady Mary, laughing; "but I think your jealousy leads you to overrate the danger."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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THE

HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

VOL. III.



THE

HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "ADELAIDE."

Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1835.



THE HEIR OF MORDAUNT.

CHAPTER I.

Come, buy of me, come; come buy, come buy.
SHAKSPEARE.

THE bazaar at Somerton went off as such scenes commonly do: a great many people came to it; a great many pretty and a great many ugly things were sold at it, and a much larger sum of money was collected than had been originally required for the object of the charity. What became of the surplus, no one ever knew; but, as it was placed in such good and respectable hands as Miss Carewell's, there can be no doubt that it was honestly applied to some very excellent and praiseworthy use.

The Estonville party were allowed the privilege of being admitted to a private view of the fancy works, before the doors were thrown open to the public, on the morning of the sale.

Miss Carewell's stall was of course placed at the head of the room, and the front of it was ostentatiously crowded with contributions sent by Lady Estonville, the Lady Mortimers, Lady Mary Carrington, Mrs. and Miss Mordaunt, and other smart people her *particular friends*: and amongst these were modestly mingled sundry elaborate works of her mother's and of her own.

She was gorgeously attired in a pelisse and a hat and feathers, sent for—as she whispered everybody in confidence—from London expressly for the occasion: and, as Lady Caroline good-naturedly observed in an under voice to her brother Philip, "the poor Carewell, presiding in state over her bags and pincushions looked the very queen of folly and vanity; and seemed to enjoy her grandeur so excessively, that it was quite a pity her reign would only last two short days."

"This must be a proud and gratifying moment to you, my dear Miss Carewell," said her ladyship aloud, as she drew nearer to her; "I really congratulate you upon the admirable and tempting display which your tables present. They are all so prettily set out, too; I never saw anything in the country so well done. The whole success of this bazaar may be attributed

to *your* exertions; and I am sure I am not mistaken in supposing that all the decorations of the room have been regulated by *your* taste. You have not forgotten your toilet either, in the multiplicity of your cares: your hat is quite perfect, — *un peu coquette*, but all the more becoming for that; —I know the *tourneur* too well to ask you where it was manufactured."

Poor Miss Carewell smiled, and blushed, and smiled again, while she listened to compliments that delighted her beyond expression, because they treacherously flattered her vanity in every point upon which it was most sensibly alive.

"Oh, dearest Lady Caroline!" she exclaimed, "you are too good! you give me far more merit than I deserve. You do not recollect how *very much* I am—we are all, indebted to Lady Estonville's patronage, and to your very kind assistance."

Mrs. Porter was one of the Somerton ladies who kept another of the stalls. She was arrayed in every colour of the rainbow; her face was bright crimson; and, in spite of the heat, bustle and importance which evidently oppressed her, she had a well satisfied smile of great happiness. She cordially shook hands with

Lady Agnes and Augusta, who had good-naturedly sent her some trifling things; and assured the former how very much she felt honoured in having the *handiworks* of a lady *of* quality at *her* stall.

"Indeed, my lady," concluded she, "as I said to Mr. Porter last night, it is an honour *I* never should have looked for; and I believe it makes some of my neighbours very jealous: they will not give themselves boastful airs to me again in a hurry."

Then turning to Augusta, she very warmly expressed her obligations to her also.

Mrs. Mordaunt glanced her eye over the curious medley of frightful, vulgar things which the good lady had collected and was now surveying with complacent admiration, and told her, "that she had been commissioned by her eldest son to make a purchase for him at her table, and that he had particularly desired it might be some curiosity of her own making."

Mrs. Porter could never find in her heart to feel very long angry with a handsome young man. The recollection of Charles's offence had already become considerably blunted by time; and this flattering mark of his remembrance completely obliterated it from her mind.

"Captain Mordaunt is very kind and very

polite, I am sure," exclaimed she, "to think of me when he is so far away; and I only wish that I had done any piece of work pretty or genteel enough to be worth his having."

Lady Caroline now joined in the conversation, and observed, "that she could not allow Mrs. Porter to underrate the value of her performances in that way; though among such a profusion of tempting things it might certainly puzzle Mrs. Mordaunt to make a choice, as it was scarcely possible to single out any one that was very decidedly prettier than all the others."

"I am much obliged to your ladyship," answered Mrs. Porter: "I am delighted that your ladyship admires what I have got at my stall." And pulling forth a flaming red and bright green worsted comforter, she addressed herself to Augusta. "This comforter," she continued, "is my own knitting, and I really flatter myself it is rather handsome: the pattern was taken from one that a friend of mine brought straight from London. Perhaps Captain Mordaunt would condescend to wear it; it would keep him nice and warm when he goes out hunting these cold winter mornings."

"Oh yes," said Augusta, "it is just the

sort of thing he would like: pray be so g
as to reserve it for him."

"Mrs. Porter's comforter will be delightf
cried Lady Caroline, taking it up as if to
mine it; and she continued talking to
and commenting upon her beautiful and
genious contrivances, for a length of time.

The Estonville carriages at last drove a
one after another from the door of the
Lady Mary Carrington took her sister Lady
in her chaise: and "for fear they sh
quarrel by the way," as she expressed it,
asked a young man, who happened to b
reigning flirt with them both, to accomp
them.

"A bumper is certainly a dreadful bo
said Lady Mary, as she threw herself bac
the carriage: "I am almost dead, and ne
mind: and the worst part of the busi
is, that we have yet suffered only half of
misery—we must go through the same pena
to-morrow."

"Do not despise me," replied Lady Caroli
"when I confess to you that I have been m
entertained by many things to-day."

"Despise you, Lady Caroline!—on the c
trary, I admire your ingenuity," observed
gentleman.

"You may laugh at me if you please," continued her ladyship, "but it diverted me excessively to see the *charitable* ladies so enchanted with themselves and with their own performances, and so perfectly persuaded that *we* must be *éblouies* and enchanted with them also. Then the figures—the dresses that were exhibited with conscious pride and satisfaction! and that certainly were much too good to be easily forgotten! You surely must have been amused with some of them?"

"Oh, undoubtedly there were many admirable quizzes. Your eloquence is irresistible, and can give any colouring you wish to the dullest subject. I begin to suspect that you will soon persuade me to believe that the scene we have just left was a particularly entertaining one."

Lady Caroline laughed. "You do me injustice," she said. "I had no intention of attempting anything so ultra as making you think that black was white: I only desired to mention to you what had appeared diverting to *me*. Those who know me best, are well aware that I was always blessed with a keen perception of the ridiculous."

"The Carewell excelled herself to-day," exclaimed Lady Mary; "and I look forward

with great delight to the brilliant accounts she will give us hereafter of the compliments that have been paid her, and the conquests she has made at her bazaar. I am convinced she thought all the ladies envied her, and all the gentlemen were deeply in love with her."

"To be sure she did," rejoined Lady Caroline; "and, as far as *one* gentleman was concerned, I am not quite certain that she was mistaken. Mr. Twiston paid her very devoted attention. I wish with all my heart that he would marry her; I will try to give him a little good advice upon the subject: they are admirably suited to one another—it would be quite a *belle alliance*."

"That Miss Laura Stanley is a very pretty girl," remarked the gentleman.

"Yes," answered Lady Mary, "she is a very pretty, insipid little thing: whenever you meet her, you see the same amiable unmeaning smile upon her lips; she has no variety of countenance. Would you believe that she was foolish enough to refuse Sir Charles Parker a short time ago, with the hope of some day or other becoming Mrs. Edward Mordaunt? It is a brilliant prospect certainly! Yet I imagine her future *belle-mère* does not feel peculiarly obliged to her for having preferred it to that which our friend placed before her."

It would be tedious to relate more of this sort of conversation, which went on with little intermission till the end of the drive.

Everybody appeared fatigued; and the evening was passed in talking over the occurrences of the day,—in comparing the various purchases that had been made, and in discussing the comparative merits of the different stalls.

The sale the following morning passed off rather more heavily than the preceding one had done; yet it was sooner brought to a conclusion, as there was to be a ball at night. Some of the ladies who appeared at it looked a little jaded by their previous exertions; but the dancing was kept up with much spirit, and Lady Caroline Mortimer had the satisfaction of watching Miss Carewell and Mr. Twiston figuring away together in a quadrille.

Her ladyship had amused herself the night before by speaking much in Miss Carewell's praise; and when she perceived that Mr. Twiston was listening to her, she said in a grave voice to Lady Mary, "that, until this bazaar, she had had no idea their friend had possessed so much weight and influence in the neighbourhood; that her personal popularity had enabled her to carry her plan successfully into effect; and that she had really done wonders."

The bait took admirably. Mr. Twiston began to look upon the queen of the bazaar as a person of some consequence, and determined to treat her with increased attention.

As no man of higher rank advanced to claim her hand at the ball, he ventured to request the honour of dancing the first quadrille with her: she smiled a delighted assent; and when they stood up, Lady Caroline whispered to her own partner,

"You will allow that I have fanned that flame with tolerable skill; do pray remark how hopefully it burns."

Augusta did not make her appearance that evening at Somerton. Mrs. Mordaunt could not bear to permit her beautiful daughter to be seen in the character of a neglected damsel at a country-ball; and she was aware that Lady Caroline would feel a spiteful pleasure in mortifying her there, if it was in her power to do so. She consequently pretended to think her too ill and too much tired to allow her to venture out at night.

Augusta herself had no desire to join the dancing-party; and as she really had a slight cold, the plea her mother made sounded extremely plausible.

CHAPTER II.

—— Quite dejected with my scorn,
He left me to my pride;
And sought a solitude forlorn,
In secret, where he died.

GOLDSMITH.

THE party at Estonville did not assemble until considerably later than usual the morning after the ball; but Augusta Mordaunt, who had been up in good time, went to visit Lady Agnes during her toilet, to hear an account of the preceding evening.

The latter was just giving her a description of Mrs. Porter's exertions in a country-dance, when she was interrupted by the entrance of her maid, who came to bring her a letter, and then retired again.

Lady Agnes blushed when she received it, for she saw by the direction that it was from Captain Mordaunt. It was sealed with Lord Delmore's seal; and as this circumstance informed her he must be staying at D'Arcy, she

rather wondered he had not asked Lionel to frank it.

Augusta remarked the heightened colour that rose into her friend's face; and as she guessed what might have occasioned it, she walked towards the window, to allow her to read her despatch without fear of observation.

She had stood there for some minutes, when she was startled by hearing a sort of hysterical sob; she turned her head to discover from whence it proceeded, and became petrified with astonishment and alarm when she beheld Lady Agnes sitting pale as death, with her eyes fixed with a look of indescribable anguish upon the letter she still held in her hand.

"Dearest Agnes!" exclaimed Augusta, advancing gently towards her, "tell me, I beseech you, what has happened thus to distress you?"

At the sound of her voice, Lady Agnes burst into tears; and as soon as she was able to speak, she replied in broken accents,—

"I have reason to fear that a most dreadful, a most afflicting calamity is likely to come upon me. This letter is from Charles; the grievous intelligence it communicates does not relate personally to himself, but it distresses him very deeply."

Miss Mordaunt turned very faint, and could with difficulty support herself, while her companion continued,—

"Oh, Augusta! you will, I know, feel for me, and feel with me, when I tell you that my dear Lionel is very dangerously ill,—that his life is despaired of!"

When Lady Agnes pronounced these last words, poor Augusta started as if a dagger had pierced her heart; she uttered a faint scream and then fell senseless upon the floor.

Her friend contrived to raise her as well as she could, bathed her temples with *eau de Cologne* and soon restored her to herself.

"You are very good to me, Agnes," she said, as she affectionately squeezed her hand; "and I am very much ashamed of having tormented you with uneasiness upon my account at such a moment as this. I do pity you with all my heart, and sympathise most sincerely in your sorrow. Is there no hope? You must let me hear everything about him,—every particular of his illness; pray conceal no circumstance from my knowledge."

"Your brother's letter," answered Lady Agnes, "contains all the information I possess;" and she held it towards her as she spoke.

Augusta attempted to read it; but she was so completely blinded by her tears, that it was a long while before she could accomplish the painful task.

The account Charles gave of Lord Delmore had evidently been written under great distress of mind; yet it was sufficiently distinct. He said, "he understood that, owing to the unusual severity of the weather, Lionel had caught a bad cold during his journey to the North; that he had unfortunately neglected it after he arrived at D'Arcy, and had allowed it to get worse and worse, until it appeared likely to settle upon his chest. That even then he had obstinately refused to send for medical advice, in spite of all the entreaties of his attached servants, old Morrice and Fletcher. That at length the latter had become so seriously alarmed, that, without mentioning his intention to any one, he had written to *him* to let him know how ill Lord Delmore was, and to conjure him to come if possible, and take care of him before it was too late. That upon receiving Fletcher's letter, he had of course obtained leave to set out for D'Arcy without delay; and that when he reached that place, he had found poor Lionel in a much more dangerous state than he had expected: that the complaint was taking

an inflammatory turn; and that, instead of consulting his friend's wishes, it had been absolutely necessary instantly to despatch an express for the nearest physician. That though Lord Delmore had expressed great pleasure when he was informed of his arrival, and had believed it to have been accidental, the excitement of seeing him had unhappily aggravated all his bad symptoms; and that before the doctor made his appearance, the inflammation had increased to so fearful a height, that his recovery appeared almost hopeless."—"A few hours," concluded Charles, "must now decide his fate. I fervently pray that his life may be spared to us; but I should deceive you, if I told you that Dr. Thornwood had given me the least ray of encouragement, or if I said that I was cheered by any sanguine feeling of my own. It grieves me to know how much this letter will afflict you. I only send it at present, because I think that in case my worst apprehensions should be too fatally verified, it will prepare you for a shock which I am well aware that your strong affection for poor Lionel will render peculiarly overpowering to you."

Augusta returned the letter to Lady Agnes, and neither of them spoke for many minutes;

they could find no hope to cling to, no comfort to suggest, and they continued to weep in silence. Both were deeply distressed, but Miss Mordaunt's feelings were the most acutely painful; she could not help suspecting that she had been instrumental in precipitating the awful catastrophe which it now appeared to be beyond the power of human skill to avert. She feared that Lionel's disappointment at Mordaunt might have caused him to take less care in guarding himself against the inclemency of the weather while he was travelling North, than under happier circumstances he would naturally have done; and she was much inclined to imagine that vexation and self-reproach might afterwards have preyed upon his mind, and have induced him to neglect the preservation of his health. The same sort of ideas had occurred to Lady Agnes, and had heightened the compassion she felt for her unhappy companion.

At length she rose from her chair. "I must go," she said, "and perform the sad duty of communicating my melancholy intelligence to my father and mother. I am sorry to leave you, dear Augusta; but I trust you will still be here when I come back."

Miss Mordaunt promised to await her re-

turn; and the moment Lady Agnes closed the door, she threw herself upon her knees, and prayed long and earnestly for Lord Delmore's recovery, and likewise for strength and fortitude to bear her present anxiety, and to support every future trial that might be sent her.

When Lady Agnes rejoined her, she found her much more composed than she had left her. She told her that Lord and Lady Estonville had been extremely shocked by hearing of Lionel's danger; but that, after the former had read Charles's letter a second time, he had not considered the case quite so desperate as at first:—that he had recommended her to endeavour to keep up her spirits, and to remember that while life remained hope could never be entirely extinct; and had added, that he was not himself by any means inclined to despair.

Augusta caught at the possibility of Lord Delmore's amendment, as a condemned criminal might have caught at the hint of a pardon; and Lady Agnes was very willing to be persuaded that Charles's extreme anxiety about his friend might have led him to believe his danger greater than it really was. In short, they both began to look forward to the arrival

of the morrow's post with something more like hopeful impatience than decided dread.

Lady Mary Carrington felt as much concern for her cousin as she was capable of feeling for anybody; and she was a good deal shocked at the idea of a relation and a contemporary of her own being snatched out of the world so suddenly. But no impression of this sort was very lasting in her mind; and before the morning was over, she was able to find amusement in talking sentimentally of "poor dear Lionel," and informing the gentlemen who were staying at Estonville how very miserable she was about him.

Her sister Lady Caroline behaved very differently. When she was told of Lord Delmore's illness, her grief was quite frantic and ungovernable; she entirely forgot her resentment against him; her former attachment revived with redoubled force, and for a long while she continued in violent hysterics. Even after these had abated, she refused to listen either to comfort or consolation: she shut herself up in her own room, declared that she would see nobody, and that she did not care who heard of her despair.

The bad news that Lord and Lady Estonville had received soon spread through the house, and their numerous guests thought it

would be right immediately to disperse. When their host heard of this intention, however, he requested that they would not put it into execution that day. He said, "he trusted he might have a more favourable account of Lord Delmore the following morning; and that in that case he should very much regret having been unnecessarily deprived of the society of his friends."

This arrangement was much more convenient to those who had come from a distance than an instant departure, and was consequently agreed to without difficulty. All the party made their preparations for leaving Estonville the next morning, while every individual sincerely wished that these preparations might prove unnecessary.

When Mrs. Mordaunt did not find her daughter down-stairs, she guessed that she must be with Lady Agnes; and as she was anxious to see them both, she went to seek them in her room. She did not affect particularly to notice Augusta, yet her manner towards her was unusually kind. She seated herself by Lady Agnes, and the latter was extremely gratified by the warm sympathy she expressed for her distress, and by the deep interest she seemed to feel for Lord Delmore.

"Mr. Mordaunt and I," she observed, "had determined to go home, as we fancied we must be in the way here; but Lord Estonville pressed us so kindly to stay till to-morrow, that we have consented to do so. You will then, I hope, be relieved from your most painful apprehensions; and in the mean while, I flatter myself I may be able to be of some use to you and to poor Lady Estonville."

"It is very good of you," replied Lady Agnes, "to remain in such a melancholy house; and it will, I am sure, be a great comfort to mamma to know that you are here, and to talk to you about Lionel when she is well enough to see you. Her grief has given her a bad headache; she is now gone to lie down, and she told me she did not wish to be disturbed for an hour or two."

Mrs. Mordaunt was in fact deputed to do the honours of the house, as neither the countess nor her daughters appeared at dinner. Lady Mary was ashamed to show herself at that time; but she could not resist joining the party in the evening, as she had done at intervals in the earlier part of the day.

The following morning an express from Estonville brought the letters from the post-town an hour sooner than they would have come in

the natural course of things. There was one for Lady Agnes: she was sitting with her mother, and her father carried it to her himself.

"Here is a red seal;" he said, "therefore I hope that all will be well."

She started up and took it from his hand; but her fingers trembled so violently that she could scarcely open it. Having glanced her eye hastily over the first sentence, "Thank God!" she exclaimed, "he is still alive,—he is likely to recover!" And then, overpowered by her feelings, she sunk down upon her chair.

Captain Mordaunt's description of Lord Delmore's situation was comprised in two brief pages. He announced that the crisis of Lionel's complaint was over, and that it had taken a favourable turn,—in short, that Dr. Thornwood assured him, if his patient had no relapse, that there was every prospect of his recovery. He added, "that after his first letter was despatched, his poor friend had become considerably worse; and that everybody about him looked upon his amendment as quite miraculous."

Lady Caroline's joy and exultation when she heard that a satisfactory account had been received of her cousin, were as great as her grief and depression had been the day before. But after her first happiness had in some mea-

were withheld, she became a little ashamed of herself for having recklessly exposed her feelings to so many persons.

The tidings of Lord Delmere's convalescence were soon communicated to Augusta by Lady Agnes, for whom she had been waiting in breathless and agonizing impatience; and she made no attempt to conceal the delight she felt at finding that Lionel was likely to be restored to health. Her agitation was excessive, and there was a youthful character in her joy that did not escape her friend's observation. The anxiety and interest she expressed about the invalid continued afterwards unabated; but as the bulletins of his health improved, she spoke of him less frequently to Lady Agnes; and when she did mention him, it was with more timidity and reserve.

Charles sent a daily report to Estonville; and in one of his letters he said that he had written a full description of her son's illness to Lady Delmere. This despatch had an effect by little anticipated, for it actually brought her ladyship to D'Arcy. When she heard of Lionel's danger, she was seized with a feeling of remorse; her heart smote her for all her former unkindness towards him, and, as an

atonement, she determined to go and see him without an instant's delay.

His mother's unexpected arrival gave Lord Delmore more satisfaction than most things would have done. It gratified him extremely to find that she was at length disposed to treat him with the affection of a parent; he no longer felt himself a forlorn and deserted being; he was deeply obliged to Lady Delmore for the painful exertion she had made in coming to D'Arcy; and as his malady had originally been much upon his spirits, her presence caused an agreeable sort of excitement which proved very beneficial in promoting his recovery.

In another point of view her appearance was also particularly well timed, and was the greatest possible relief to Charles, whose short leave was nearly expired, and who could not bear the idea of consigning Lionel entirely to the care of Fletcher; who, though a most attentive nurse, could not supply his own place as a companion to the invalid.

Captain Mordaunt's first meeting with Lady Delmore was rather an awkward one to himself, as he was aware that she hated his very name, because she considered his approaching marriage with Lady Agnes Mortimer a great

proof of disrespect to the memory of her beloved eldest son.

Her ladyship, when he handed her out of her carriage, was remarkably cold and haughty; she made a stiff and short inquiry about "Lord Delmore's health," of which, she said, "she had been so happy as to hear a favourable account at the last stage;" and, as she was really very much overcome when she entered the house at D'Arcy, she begged that she might be left for some time alone, and that Lord Delmore might not be informed of her arrival until she was sufficiently composed to be able to see him.

Her ladyship became much softened, however, after her interview with Lionel; perhaps, in his present delicate state, he reminded her of her favourite child in a way that he had never done before;—at any rate, her heart warmed towards him; and when she heard the high terms in which he spoke of his friend, and observed the quiet attentions he received from him, she began to look upon Captain Mordaunt with more friendly eyes,—she even consulted him about her future plans for her son.

She told him, "that it would be uncomfortable for her to remain long at D'Arcy; and that, considering the fatal tendency to consumption which there was in his family, she thought

it desirable that Lionel should spend some time in a warmer climate. That Dr. Thornwood had suggested the West of England, which she also deemed preferable in his case to the Continent; as taking him abroad would revive very painful recollections in his mind. That it was her intention to hint to her son that he must require a little change of air to recruit his strength after so severe an illness, and to propose to him to accompany her to Devonshire as soon as he should be well enough to bear the journey." She graciously added, "that as she imagined Captain Mordaunt would be in town in the spring, and travelling was so easy to gentlemen, it would give her much pleasure if her son could induce him to pay them a visit."

Charles was delighted with Lady Delmore's scheme, and he had the satisfaction of hearing it talked over and arranged with Lionel himself before he departed for Scotland. He had so many objects of interest elsewhere, that he now became impatient to be released from his regimental duty. His father had exerted himself to facilitate his wishes, and had obtained for him a promise of promotion, which he hoped to see very soon ratified in the Gazette.

"What could be the reason," said Mrs.

Mordaunt confidentially to Lady Agnes Mortimer, the evening before she left Estonville, "that influenced Augusta so positively to decline listening to Lord Delmore's advances? She is evidently very much attached to him: she looked the picture of misery while he was considered in danger; and though she now puts on an affectation of gaiety, she is yet scarcely able to hold up her head."

"You have asked me an enigma," replied Lady Agnes, "which it is beyond my power to solve. I have tried in a thousand ways to draw the secret from Augusta herself, but always without success; and I quite despair of ever becoming acquainted with it. An idea has sometimes crossed my mind, but I own it is a very improbable one,—can she in a moment of anger have made a rash vow never to marry Delmore? and does she consequently think herself bound to refuse his hand, in spite of the affection she undoubtedly feels for him?"

Mrs. Mordaunt mused for an instant.

"What you have suggested is certainly not impossible," answered she; "yet I agree with you, that it seems extremely unlikely. It is a hint, however, that I will not lose sight of: and should you by any accident gain a clearer light upon this mysterious subject, you will, I

am sure, immediately communicate to me your discovery."

Lady Agnes readily engaged to do this; but she had afterwards no opportunity of possessing herself of any farther information. She heard frequently from her aunt, and occasionally from Lionel, during his convalescence; yet, when Lady Delmore and her son removed from Yorkshire, they declined stopping at Estonville in their way to Devonshire, though it would have taken them very little out of their direct road.

gay-spirited, light-hearted person she had formerly been. She did not permit herself, however, to encourage melancholy thoughts, or to indulge vain regrets; she strove to be cheerful and satisfied; and if she could not now and then entirely avoid the temptation of sorrowing over the past, it was upon Lionel's account, and not upon her own, that she grieved.

Mr. Mordaunt felt little taste for rural scenes; and when the days began to lengthen, he grew tired of the prospect of his green fields; and, under pretence of wishing to expedite Charles's affairs at the Horse Guards, he went up to London alone, leaving his wife and daughter to follow him in May.

The day before they were to set out upon their journey, Augusta walked to the gardener's cottage to take leave of her friend Mrs. Barker. It always gave Mary great pleasure to see Miss Mordaunt, and she expressed to her very strongly the sorrow she now felt at the idea of her absence.

"I shall miss you sadly, Miss," she said; "but I shall not be alone while you are away; my husband's sister, Susan Leary, came here quite unexpectedly to visit us last night."

"I did not know that he had a sister of that name," replied Augusta.

"Most likely not, miss," continued Mrs. Barker. "She is a good deal older than Thomas, and she went out of this country long before you were born. She lived with poor Miss Mordaunt when she was a young lady, and she remained with her after she married Mr. O'Donnel. Her mistress was very partial to her, and she was the only one of her English servants her husband allowed her to take with her to Ireland. When her children were born, she made her her nurse; and Susan continued to take care of them after their poor mother's death, until she was married herself to an Irishman of the name of Leary. She was very much attached to all the little orphans, but the young gentleman who was drowned was quite her favourite. She came over to see her relations here soon after he died, and she would then sit and cry about him for hours together, and wish that she had never left him, and blame the cruel neglect of those who had the charge of him. You have heard the story of his being lost in the river, I suppose, Miss Mordaunt?"

Augusta answered that she had, and that she had always felt a great interest in the melancholy fate of that unfortunate child.

"It was a shocking thing, to be sure," pursued Mrs. Barker. "Well, Susan went back

to her husband, and they got into difficulties and distresses, and Mr. O'Donnel used them very hardly. She scarcely ever wrote to us, except once, to say that her two daughters were married, and another time to tell us that she had lost her husband. As she was now a lone woman, my good man recommended her to come and end her days with her own family; but she sent him word by a friend of hers, 'that since her dear young gentlemen were all gone, and their mother's estate had passed into other hands, she had made a determination never to set her foot within the village of Mordaunt again.' It seems, however, it was her poverty that rendered her unwilling to return amongst us; for as soon as one of her Irish relations unexpectedly left her a sum of money, she packed up her effects and travelled home to settle herself, as far as I can make out, (but she is rather mysterious about her plans,) in some comfortable cottage in this village."

"And where is Mrs. Leary at this moment?" inquired Augusta.

"She is walked out with my husband," replied Mrs. Barker, "to call upon some of her old acquaintance. They will be back presently, for they have been gone a long time. I should like you to see Susan, miss; she has been ask-

ing me a great deal about all the family at the Park, and about *you* in particular."

Augusta wondered why the stranger should have expressed any peculiar curiosity about her; but before she had an opportunity of questioning her companion farther, Barker and his sister entered the cottage.

"This is Miss Mordaunt, Susan," said Mrs. Barker.

Mrs. Leary curtsied, and then fixed her eyes upon Augusta with a look of eager and penetrating interest. She was herself a plain, hard-featured woman; her countenance was sensible, but sorrow and unkind treatment had given it a stern expression which it had not originally possessed, while hardships and privations had imprinted an air of premature old age upon her whole appearance. Her manner struck Augusta as extremely repulsive; and, without knowing why, she felt half afraid of her.

Mrs. Barker seemed to think that her sister-in-law had not greeted Miss Mordaunt with sufficient respect.

"You see, Susan," she observed, "that all I told you of our dear young lady's appearance was quite true; and I may again and again assure you, that when you know her as well as

I do, you will find she is as good as she is pretty."

"I am glad to hear such a favourable account of her," answered Mrs. Leary drily. Then turning to Augusta, she added, "I suppose, Miss *Willoughby*,"—and she laid a strong emphasis upon the name,—"that Mary Barker has been describing to you who I am."

Augusta affected not to remark this peculiar mode of address.

"She has," she replied; "and she appears to hope that you are likely to establish yourself at Mordaunt."

"I do not know how that may be," continued Susan; "I never intended to have seen this place again; and now that I am come here, I feel by no means sure how long I may be inclined to stay."

"I suspect," pursued Augusta very kindly, "that we shall find you still with your relations when we return from London. At any rate, I am glad to have made acquaintance with you before we go away: we are to leave Mordaunt to-morrow."

"You are a gracious-spoken young lady, I must confess," said Mrs. Leary, in a softened tone; "and if you would always behave as I

could wish you to do, I could love you with all my heart, and pray night and morning that every happiness might fall upon your head."

Augusta looked at her with astonishment, and began almost to imagine that she must be a little deranged.

"I see," continued Mrs. Leary, as if replying to her thoughts, "that you take me to be a very queer woman,—and so I am; but you must not pay much attention to any of my strange sayings." Then, after a pause, she added,—"Miss Willoughby, are you fond of your father's new place? Do you like living at Moreland?"

"Yes, indeed," rejoined Augusta; "I am become so partial to everything here, that I feel very sorry to be going to leave the country now."

"And are your brothers as much attached to it also?"

"I assure you that they are; they both of them admire and delight in it more and more every time they come home."

"Well may they do so!" exclaimed Susan Leary. "It was a beautiful place when *I* knew it, and my brother tells me that Mr. Willoughby has been doing great things to the

house, as well as to the grounds, since he came to it."

"I hope you will come and see the improvements," replied Augusta; "and you shall let me hear what you think of them when we meet again."

"Thank you for your invitation, miss; but I do not believe I shall be able to make up my mind to accept it at present. I could not bear to go into my poor dear mistress's house now that it belongs to a stranger; it is sad enough for me to recollect her loss elsewhere, and to remember all her poor children who are gone! I do not mean any disrespect to your father, however; he came into his inheritance in no unrightful manner. I have always heard him spoken of as a worthy and an honourable gentleman; and I have often and often regretted that Miss Mordaunt did not marry him instead of Mr. O'Donnel, as poor old Mr. Mordaunt wished her to have done."

"It would certainly have been much happier for herself if she had," remarked Augusta, who had heard before that such an alliance had been formerly projected, but who could not quite join with Susan in lamenting that it had not taken place.

"You were extremely attached," she added, "to poor Mrs. O'Donnel and to her children?"

"You may say that," replied Mrs. Leary, very warmly; "I loved the dear babies, when they were babies, as if they had been my own; and you may be sure I was proud enough of those who grew up to be handsome young men. But I did not see them very often after they were sent to school;—a sad bringing up I am afraid they had, and melancholy ends did they all come to!"

"I forget what was the Christian name of the one who was drowned."

"He was called Richard,—and a most beautiful boy he was; he always promised to have been the flower of the whole flock. I grieved more bitterly for *his* loss than for any other misfortune that ever came upon me—and I have had sorrows enough in my time. I could not help reproaching myself, too; for I knew that if I had stayed with the dear child, that which did happen to him never would have happened."

"It was impossible you could foresee such a calamity," remarked Augusta. "I remember, that when mamma first gave me an account of your favourite's fate, it made a deep impression upon my mind. I could think of nothing but

the poor lost child all night afterwards; and it still strikes me as one of the most touching histories I ever heard."

While Miss Mordaunt was speaking these words, Mrs. Leary surveyed her with a peculiarly piercing glance.

"You pitied him, then?" she said, in an ironical sort of tone: "yet his loss proved a great gain to your family; for if that precious boy had been found alive, your father would never have been the possessor of Mordaunt Park."

"He did not become so," replied Augusta, "till many years after the time I mention. I had then scarcely heard of such a place as Mordaunt; but if I had known it as well as I do now, and if Richard O'Donnel had been the only surviving brother of his race, I hope and believe that I should equally have wished that he could have been rescued from a watery grave."

"It would have been a noble and a generous wish," continued Mrs. Leary, with an approving smile. "If my darling Richard had lived to be a man, he would have been the handsomest gentleman in all England and Ireland; and he would have made a very suitable and admirable husband for you, Miss Willoughby."

Augusta started and blushed. She felt that

Mrs. Leary intended to pay her a very high compliment; yet a connexion with an O'Donnel was so associated in her imagination with ideas of misery, that she involuntarily exclaimed,

"Oh, that would have been an alliance that could never have taken place! Mr. Richard O'Donnel would have been much too good for me: or, perhaps, like his mother, I might have had the bad taste to have preferred somebody else to my handsome and agreeable cousin!"

The expression of Susan Leary's features changed entirely, and she muttered between her teeth,

"Very probably you would: I have been told that you were wilful. But many a proud perverse spirit has been humbled into obedience before now, and so may yours be some day."

Augusta felt little inclination to listen to any more of the stranger's disagreeable, ungracious remarks. She bade adieu very kindly to Mrs. Barker and her husband, wished their sister a good morning, and left the cottage.

When she returned home, she found Mrs. Mordaunt very busily occupied in directing the packing and superintending various other domestic arrangements preparatory to their departure; but in the evening she related to her

the particulars of her interview with the extraordinary person she had seen at Mary Barker's.

"I do not at all admire the practice you have got into," said her mother, "of conversing in this sort of way with everybody you happen to meet in the cottages: your doing so cannot be of any service to *them*, and it subjects *you*, as you have found to-day, to have very unpleasant and impertinent things said to you."

Augusta partly felt the justice of this reproof; yet she was surprised that Mrs. Mordaunt appeared to take so little interest in her description of Susan Leary. There was a peculiarity in that woman's manner, and in the style of her conversation — an indescribable something in her whole character and deportment, so different from what she had ever met with before, that she had altogether established a very firm hold upon her imagination, and she could not banish her from her thoughts.

One of Augusta's greatest objections to moving from Mordaunt arose from her reluctance to leave the Miss Stanleys, who were on their side equally sorry to part with her; but they now felt no apprehension of being forgotten by their friend, or of being a second time overlooked if they happened to meet her in the dazzling crowd of her London acquaintance.

She talked alternately of her dress and of her children, and seemed to forget that these subjects might not always be considered quite so important and interesting by other people as they were by herself.

Both the heir-apparent and his lady were extremely civil to Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter; (Mr. Mordaunt they had of course frequently seen before;) and Lord Mortimer said some very flattering things to them about Charles, and about the approaching connexion between the two families.

Augusta had much to talk over with Lady Agnes; and as Lady Caroline was completely occupied with her sister-in-law, the other two young ladies were left to enjoy an undisturbed conversation during the early part of the evening.

Lady Caroline was in great beauty, and apparently in high spirits. Her manner to Augusta was much the same as when they last met at Estonville; perhaps it was rather less decidedly hostile, yet it had lost none of its haughtiness or reserve.

After the gentlemen made their appearance, Lady Mortimer found herself rather in her companion's way, and she consequently joined Lady Agnes.

"You must not forget, Agnes," she said, "to give me the direction of your new milliner. I want your advice, too, about my velvet gown; I do not quite like the style in which it is trimmed. Miss Mordaunt, I hope you will also let me have *your* counsel upon this subject: if I may judge from the choice of your own *parure*, you must be a connoisseur in these matters. I remember that Mrs. Mordaunt was always famed for her good taste in dress, and I dare say that you inherit the talent."

A long discussion upon fashions followed this opening; and as Lady Mortimer was just come from Paris, her remarks were very luminous.

"By the by, Miss Mordaunt," at length she exclaimed, "you must come some morning to see my children. I shall be quite impatient to show them to you. Do call upon me *very early* —I never go out before four o'clock. I hope you like children:—but mine are such loves, such darlings, that I am sure you will admire *them*, even if you do not happen to be very fond of little boys and girls in general."

Augusta assured her ladyship that she should be delighted to accept her invitation, and to be allowed to visit her nursery; and she continued to be much amused by the volubility of

her conversation, until her attention was attracted by a dialogue which was carried on in an under tone between Philip Mortimer and another young man who had formerly been one of her constant partners.

The speakers were not standing very near her, and had evidently no intention of admitting her into their counsel; but it did perversely so happen, that she could not help overhearing a great part of what they said.

"Have you seen Stafford since his return to town?" inquired Lord Estonville's guest.

"Yes; I met him at Crockford's last night," replied Philip.

"Then you can tell me what he has been doing with himself, and where he has been spending his time lately? I hear that he has kept entirely out of sight — remained quite *perdu* — since that unlucky moment when he was turned off in a summary manner by his intended bride,—or, according to his own version of the story, since he declined to marry her."

"As to Stafford's proceedings," rejoined Philip, "I can give you very little information; for I did not find him particularly prone to talk about them. All I could extract from him was, that he had been travelling from

place to place, and had latterly been visiting some distant relations in Ireland. Whoever his companions may have been, their society seems to have proved very consolatory to him, for he is in excellent spirits. He has very little the air of a desponding lover, and I am much mistaken if he will very long continue to wear the willow."

"I cannot say quite the same thing of '*la belle Auguste*,' as Lady Caroline used to call her; I never saw anybody so much altered as *she* is since last year."

"That young lady rather puzzles me," observed Philip: "I used formerly to think she did not fancy Stafford; yet she has certainly looked anything but happy ever since their separation. It always struck me that their marriage was broken off in a very unaccountable way; and such odd changes are constantly happening in this variable world, that I should not very much wonder if it was to come on again some time or other."

What followed was inaudible to Augusta; but she had already heard enough to furnish her with subjects for reflection of no very agreeable or consolatory nature.

The next week Miss Mordaunt met Mr. Stafford at a ball. She imagined he would

have avoided her; but, instead of this, he advanced towards her the instant he perceived her, and held out his hand with his former cordiality. She was too much astonished to be able to greet him in an equally unembarrassed manner; yet, as she had no reason to decline continuing upon friendly terms with him, she answered all the questions he addressed to her very civilly. By degrees, they entered into a more regular kind of conversation; and when other people stood up to begin a new quadrille, he asked her to dance with him.

Mrs. Mordaunt was quite as much surprised as her daughter at Mr. Stafford's conduct. She supposed that he showed Augusta this sort of attention in public, to prove to the world that, although their intended alliance had been set aside, no cause of serious offence had been given or received by either party.

The following day the Mordaunts dined at home; and as they had no invitation afterwards, Augusta went to spend the evening with Lady Agnes Mortimer.

"You will go to Almack's to-morrow night, I suppose?" said the latter, just before she took leave of her companion.

"Yes," replied Augusta. "Mamma is engaged to pass the morning with a friend of hers

CHAPTER IV.

Now comes my fortune's crisis near!
Entreaty boots not—instant fear,
Nought else, can bend Matilda's pride,
Or win her to be Wilfrid's bride.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

MRS. MORDAUNT set out upon her drive about one o'clock. Augusta amused herself for half an hour in trying some new music, and had afterwards nearly finished a letter to Laura Stanley, when she heard the sound of a double knock.

She paid little attention to it; for, as she had desired that no morning visitors were to be admitted, she believed herself quite safe from intrusion. It may be imagined, therefore, how excessively she was startled when the door of the room in which she was sitting was suddenly thrown open and Mr. Stafford was announced.

She felt that her position was a very awkward one, and was much inclined to be vexed and angry with the servant whose stupidity



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perance of my language and behaviour during that unhappy evening I spent at Mordaunt; and I am now come to throw myself at your feet, and to implore you to grant me your forgiveness."

"If you then offended me," answered Augusta, turning very pale, "I have already long ago forgotten it and forgiven you. I wish sincerely that an amicable feeling may always subsist between us; yet I beg very clearly to explain to you that I am incapable of entertaining any warmer sentiments towards you than those of amity."

Mr. Stafford drew his hand across his brow, and it was some moments before he spoke again. At length he said, in a subdued and hesitating tone,

"You once told me, that although I had been so unfortunate as to fail in my endeavours to obtain your affections, you would not refuse to be persuaded to bestow upon me your hand. May I hope to find you still willing to consent to such a sacrifice?"

"My answer to that question," replied Augusta in a calm and steady voice, "must be short and decisive. Since the time you allude to, my whole character, all my ideas, have undergone an entire change; and no consideration

would now prevail upon me to agree to an alliance I might then have been induced to enter into. Mr. Stafford, I request you finally to understand that I never can and never will become your wife!"

Mr. Stafford had expected to meet with a repulse, yet the brief uncompromising terms in which it had been conveyed stung him to the quick: his eyes flashed fire, his countenance assumed its most sinister expression, and he actually trembled with rage and mortification.

"I have humbled myself," he exclaimed, "to sue for your favour with the most devoted and deferential submission; and I have sued in vain! You have spurned me from you with haughty and unfeeling contempt! A very worm will turn when it is trod upon, and that poor despised worm you will find in *me!* I am now driven to woo you in a loftier and a more commanding tone,—to urge the force of rights which I had intended should, for the present at least, have remained in abeyance. A happy chance has placed your fate—the fate of all your family, at *my* disposal; and since you cannot teach me not to love you, Augusta, you *must* and *shall* accept me as your husband!"

Miss Mordaunt was much alarmed by the wildness of his appearance and the violence of his expressions.

"This insulting conduct is more than I can bear," said she, as she walked towards the door. "If my father had been at home, you would not have dared to address this sort of menacing language to his daughter under his own roof. I shall spare you the disgrace of repeating to him everything you have just spoken; but since you seem to have forgotten how to maintain the character of a gentleman, all acquaintance and communication must from this moment be at an end between us."

"You must not go away," cried Mr. Stafford, darting forward to intercept her departure. "It grieves me to see you frightened and agitated," he added in a gentler voice. "You know that you have nothing really to apprehend from *me;* and you must pardon the unguarded warmth with which I may have expressed myself. Since we met in the country, circumstances of deep importance to us both have come accidentally to my knowledge; and it is absolutely necessary that I should communicate them to you before we now part. My narrative need not be a tedious one; let me

therefore entreat you to suspend your indignation against me, and to sit down and listen to it patiently and attentively."

"As you require me so earnestly to hear your history," replied Augusta, "I will wait and attend to it here; I only beg that you will render it as short as possible."

Mr. Stafford drew a chair towards her; but she remained standing, and made him a sign to proceed with what he had to tell her.

"I must speak," he began, "of many things which will greatly interest and surprise you; of events connected with Mr. Mordaunt's relations which are now scarcely remembered. I suppose you are already acquainted with the leading particulars of his cousin Mrs. O'Donnell's marriage, and of the untimely fates of all her children?"

"I am."

"You are aware, then, that her son Richard was believed to have been drowned; and that, although an immediate and anxious search was made for him, his friends never had the consolation of finding his remains?"

Augusta bowed an assent, and Mr. Stafford continued—

"You know that *I* am an Irishman by birth; but you are probably ignorant that my father's

native place, as well as the estate he afterwards purchased, adjoined Mr. O'Donnel's property. I was induced to go over last winter to visit that part of the country, and from a discovery I made while I was staying there, I have great reason to imagine that, instead of having perished in the river, Richard O'Donnel is still alive."

Augusta felt very faint; she sat down in the chair which Mr. Stafford had placed for her, but making an effort to recover herself, she said in an almost inarticulate voice,

"If this is really true—if it has indeed pleased Providence to preserve Richard O'Donnel's life, we must all prepare our minds to submit contentedly to the great reverse of fortune that awaits us. But why," inquired she, addressing herself more particularly to Mr. Stafford, "have you made this disclosure to *me* instead of to my father?"

"Your question is a very natural one, and I will presently explain to you the purpose I had in doing so. I hope through your means to avoid being obliged to impart the secret of his cousin's existence to Mr. Mordaunt at all, and to prevent the necessity of his ever being called upon to resign the estate of Mordaunt to its rightful owner."

[redacted]

continue to enjoy the luxuries of affluence, and your brother may still be able to form that alliance which I understand has been for some time in contemplation." He paused an instant. "If *you* will promise me to consent to become Mrs. Stafford before the end of June, and will faithfully keep your promise, *I* will solemnly engage that Richard O'Donnel shall come forward, and freely and cheerfully agree to resign all claim to his English inheritance for ever."

Augusta spoke not; her eyes were vacantly fixed, her lips were apart, and her very breathing appeared to be suspended. Her companion looked at her for a moment, and then hastily withdrew his glance. At length she slowly raised her hands—covered her face, as if she was anxious to attempt to arrange her ideas; and suddenly elevating her head, as some new thought seemed to have struck her, she said in hurried and trembling accents,

"You have told me that Richard O'Donnel is alive; but what proofs can you bring forward to establish the truth of so extraordinary an assertion? And if you were even to succeed in removing my doubts upon that point, what evidence can you produce to convince me that you really have that unaccountable influence over him which you pretend to possess? Until the

certainty of both these circumstances is incontestably placed before me, I can make no reply to your strange proposition."

"The proofs you require of your cousin's preservation shall be stated to you as clearly as you can wish; and I think you will no longer dispute my power over all his decisions and his actions, when I disclose to you that the person you have hitherto known under the erroneous name of Stafford is himself Richard O'Donnel!"

A scream burst from Augusta's lips, and she fainted. When she recovered her senses, her cousin (for such he really was) was hanging over her, and watching her with the most troubled and anxious solicitude. She assured him, in a cold and feeble tone, "that he need feel no uneasiness about her—that she should very soon get the better of the effects of her surprise;" and, pointing to a chair, she begged him to sit down, and to give her an account of the manner in which his life had been preserved, and of the circumstances which had led to his being adopted and acknowledged as a son by the late Mr. Stafford.

"It is indeed a very remarkable and mysterious history," he said, "and reflects little credit upon the memory of Mr. Stafford. You never probably heard much of my reputed

father; but I believe you may know that, after he had spent his own property, he was married in India to a great heiress, and that in case this lady died without children the whole of her fortune was entailed upon her sister—her husband was not even to possess it during his life.

"Mrs. Stafford did not very long survive her marriage. She left an only son, and the boy's health was so delicate that nobody thought he was likely to grow up. His father watched over him night and day; but I suspect that his great anxiety about him proceeded less from affection than from a selfish desire to retain the advantage of sharing and managing his wealth.

"After his widowhood, he spent much of his time at an estate he had purchased in Ireland; and during one of his visits to this place, his son, who had been gradually declining for many weeks, accidentally broke a blood-vessel, and expired almost instantaneously.

"His death was so sudden, that there was no time to send for medical advice, or even to give an alarm in the house; and his father, and an old Indian woman who had taken care of him from his birth, were the only persons who witnessed it. This poor creature became almost frantic with despair when she perceived that her beloved charge was no more, and her cries

brought Mr. Stafford's confidential servant into the room. He found his master quite overwhelmed with grief; and, in truth, the whole scene that presented itself to him was sufficiently shocking.

"The man was an unprincipled villain; but he had a ready wit, and he was well aware of what extreme importance the preservation of his son's life would have been to Mr. Stafford. A bold scheme immediately suggested itself to his imagination, and he lost not a moment in attempting to pave the way for putting it into execution.

"After offering a few common-place condolences to the disconsolate parent, and endeavouring to silence the more clamorous lamentations of the old nurse, he ventured to hint to the former, that, although it was impossible to recall the departed spirit of his poor dear young master from the dead, it would be by no means difficult secretly to procure a child of the same age, and to substitute him in his place. He observed, that nobody but themselves and Nora had at present the least suspicion of the melancholy event that had just occurred; and that it would be very easy to intimidate Nora, and to bind her to secrecy by working upon her fears. He said, that he would undertake

to bring a boy during the dusk of the evening of the following day, who might be smuggled clandestinely into the house, and who would look so like Master Stafford when he was dressed up in his clothes, that the exchange would never be suspected; and that, before the little stranger's arrival, he could manage privately to inter the remains of the poor angel they had lost beneath the floor of a grotto in the garden, where there could be no fear of their being disturbed. He added, that if he told his fellow-servants in a general sort of way, 'that their young master was not quite so well as usual,' that information would form a sufficient reason for their being forbidden to go into his room, and would also account to them for not seeing him elsewhere for several days; and that, at the end of that time, it would be very practicable to remove the changeling to England, under pretence of wishing to try the effect of a different air. He argued that such a step would be judicious, as it would render the discovery of the fraud almost impossible, and would prevent all danger of the child's being reclaimed by his own family.

"Mr. Stafford was struck by the shrewdness of this daring project, and he at once consented to sanction it; but he told Raymond, (that

was the name of his servant,) that he should leave the arrangement and execution of it entirely in *his* hands; he only reserved for himself the task of tutoring the old nurse, and securing her discretion.

"Raymond had formed a sort of friendship with a disreputable man named Leary, whose wife had formerly been entrusted with the care of Mr. O'Donnel's children; and he had learned from him how much they were neglected by their present attendants."

When she heard Mrs. Leary mentioned, Augusta started, but she made no remark. Her companion, however, had observed the movement, and asked her, "as Susan Leary was a Mordaunt woman, if she happened to know her by character?"

She replied, "that she had been a stranger even to her existence until the day before she left the country; but that she had then accidentally met her in her brother's cottage."

Mr. Stafford—for so we shall still continue to miscall him—did not take any farther notice of this answer, but proceeded thus in his narrative:—

"Raymond was aware that one of the little O'Donnels was exactly the age of young Stafford—that he was about the same height, had

the same sort of complexion, and had been thought slightly to resemble him in appearance; and this was consequently the boy he determined to steal away from his own family. He was obliged to let Leary into his confidence; and he promised to give him a large bribe if he would contrive to decoy his intended victim from his home, and bring him secretly to the grotto in Mr. Stafford's garden, where he would himself be stationed to receive him. And in order to quiet any qualms of conscience by which his accomplice might happen to be affected, Raymond reminded him that the plan he proposed, instead of being injurious to Richard O'Donnel, would prove highly advantageous, since he would be far better taken care of, and would inherit a much larger fortune from his adopted father, than he could expect to do from his own natural parent. These arguments were quite unanswerable; but it was agreed between the two villains that their plot should be carefully concealed from Susan Leary, lest her affection for little Richard should hereafter lead her into some indiscretion which might betray them.

"Leary was a tenant of Mr. O'Donnel's; and as he often brought little presents to the children from his wife, he was in the habit of

hanging about the house at all hours. The morning after young Stafford's death, he came up to my brothers and me while we were playing together out of doors, and found an opportunity of whispering in my ear that I must come and meet him outside the gates after tea, as he had something very pretty to show me; and he bade me steal out quite alone, and not tell anybody where I was going. I kept my appointment, and I found Leary waiting for me. He took me up in his arms, saying, 'that as we had a good way to go, and as the grass was wet, he had better carry me;' and to this proposal I made no resistance. He walked on at a very rapid pace, skirting along beside a wall to avoid observation; and when we came to the river's edge, he took off my hat and threw it down upon the bank, together with some flowers I chanced to have in my hand, for the purpose of misleading my friends, and inducing them to imagine that I must have fallen into the water and been drowned.

"As soon as we were entirely out of sight of my father's house, he struck across the country, talking to me all the way we went, to keep me in a good humour; and in about two hours we entered Mr. Stafford's plantations. Raymond was anxiously looking out for us from the ap-

pointed spot; a few words passed between him and Leary in a very low tone, and he put a heavy purse into the hands of the latter, who then turned round to me, and told me in a coaxing manner, 'that I must be a good boy, and go home with that gentleman, who would be very kind to me, and give me all sorts of fine things and beautiful clothes.'

"I did not the least fancy the idea of remaining with the stranger; but my remonstrances were vain: a large cloak was thrown over me, my mouth was muffled to silence my cries, and I was conveyed by Raymond into the room from which my predecessor's lifeless body had been removed only a few hours before. A gentle sleeping potion was administered to me, and I was put into bed and consigned to the care of the old Indian nurse.

"The next day I was dressed in little Stafford's clothes, (my own having been carefully destroyed by Raymond,) and Mr. Stafford came to see me. If he had any natural feeling, I must have been a most trying and painful spectacle to him; and, indeed, he stayed with me but an instant *then*. He visited me, however, repeatedly afterwards, as it was necessary that he should do, to keep up the deception he was practising. Raymond sat with me a great

deal, and tried every art to amuse me. He said, 'that I was now come to my *real* home, and that Mr. Stafford, the gentleman I had just seen, was my *real* papa: that Mr. O'Donnel was no relation of his, only a great friend; and that his children, who had been my companions, were consequently not really my brothers and sisters. That I had only lived with them hitherto because my father had feared that I should have found it dull if I had been brought up without any playfellows; but that he was now going to take me to England, where I should have plenty of things to amuse me.'

"I listened to all this without exactly understanding it. I had been accustomed to run about just where I pleased, and I did not like the confinement of being shut up the whole day in one room. I missed my brothers and sisters very much,—I cried for them to come and play with me; and I felt half afraid of old Nora's black complexion. I soon became used to this, however, and she won upon me by her kindness; she crammed me with cakes and sweetmeats, to keep me quiet in the daytime, and she lulled me to sleep by humming a monotonous sort of chant to me at night. All kinds of beautiful toys were placed before me;

and upon my promising to behave very well, and not to talk or make a noise, I was taken out to a drive in a post-chaise—a thing I had scarcely ever beheld in my life. In short, I became by degrees tolerably well reconciled to my new mode of existence; and though I often begged to be allowed to go and see the O'Donnels, and my nurse Susan Leary, I had grown respectably tractable before I was carried out of my native country. I was much afraid of Mr. Stafford; his manner towards me was invariably cold and stern; and if I was inclined to be rebellious or unruly, one glance of his eye always awed me into obedience.

"I have described these circumstances of my childhood as they were related to me by Raymond, for I have no recollection of them myself. Mr. Stafford only stayed in England as long as it was requisite to make arrangements for a removal to the Continent. He dismissed all his servants except Raymond and Nora, and proceeded to Italy, in hopes, as he pretended, of restoring his son's health. He travelled about from one place to another; and in this constant variety and change of scene I soon quite forgot my early companions, and every association connected with the name of O'Donnel was entirely obliterated from my



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could not like,—that he was sure my father would have highly disapproved of it, — and that he warned me I should bring great future trouble upon myself if I persevered in entering into it.

" You may imagine that I paid little attention to Raymond's remonstrances, and that I secretly laughed at his forebodings. When our intended marriage was, however, unfortunately broken off, I confess that they recurred to my mind; and I expected that he would have told me I might now see what had been the consequence of my disregarding them. To my surprise, instead of reproaching me for my folly, he seemed vexed and indignant at the disappointment I had met with. He observed, that I had been ill-used; and he muttered between his teeth, ' that the young lady and all her family deserved that he should disclose to me a secret they little suspected, and which, if they had been the least aware of, might well have taught them to treat me in a very different manner from what they had done.'

" My curiosity was powerfully excited by this hint; but I am not sure if it would ever have been gratified, had not Raymond just before that time received a letter from Susan Leary, which had given him considerable alarm

and uneasiness. She wrote to inform him she had become a widow, and that her husband upon his deathbed had confessed to her that her darling child, Richard O'Donnel, was still alive,—that he was grown up a rich and a great gentleman,—and that he went by the name of Mr. Stafford: that he had himself assisted in carrying the boy off from his family; and that, if she applied to Mr. Raymond, *he* could tell her all about it. She added, 'that he had made the same confession to the priest; but that he had rambled so much, that the latter was inclined to believe the whole story had been conjured up by his imagination, and had had no foundation in truth.' She said, 'that *she* was sometimes disposed to be of the same opinion; but that it was impossible for her to rest satisfied while a doubt remained upon her mind about the existence of the beloved and long-lamented child.' And finally, 'she conjured him to relieve her suspense, and to tell her as he would do if he was put upon his Bible oath, if he knew whether her mistress's son had really been drowned or not?'

"Raymond was considerably puzzled by this appeal: he was too wary to commit himself upon paper, yet he was afraid that, if he took no means to pacify Susan Leary, her inquiries

might become more dangerous and importunate; he therefore sent a sort of jesuitical answer to her letter. He began it by condoling with her upon the death of his old friend her husband;—said 'he imagined that all he had spoken in his last moments about Richard O'Donnel was merely a dream;—that he fancied he could form a guess from what circumstances that dream had arisen;—that he should be in Ireland in the course of a few months to settle some affairs of his own;—that he would then make a point of seeing her, and of talking the matter over with her; and that in the mean while he recommended her to satisfy herself as well as she could.'

"It had truly been Ryamond's intention to visit Susan in the autumn, but he wished to gain time to consider what plan it would be most prudent to adopt towards her. He would have preferred keeping her entirely in the dark, but he feared it would not be practicable to do so. The more he thought upon the subject, the more perplexing did he find it; and at length he took a sudden determination of asking *my* advice, and of disclosing to me a secret which might prove of deeper interest to *me* than it was even to himself.

"I will not attempt to describe to you the

astonishment with which I listened to his communication, or to picture the violence of the various emotions by which I was agitated. I resolved to go immediately to Ireland, and to take Raymond with me; and it was my purpose, when we arrived there, to be guided by circumstances, and to confide much or little to Susan Leary, according to the opinion I might form of her character. My first interview with her decided that point. She expressed such warm and devoted attachment for the memory of Richard O'Donnel,—such an ardent desire to ascertain what had been his fate,—that I could not resist throwing myself into my poor nurse's arms, and telling her at once who I was.

"She could not for several minutes understand or believe what she had just heard; but when she did at length fully comprehend that it was her beloved child who actually stood before her, I never can forget the transport of joy and affection with which the poor creature overwhelmed me. She wept,—she laughed,—she surveyed me from head to foot,—murmuring, 'Yes, you are a true O'Donnel—not like your dear mother, but the very image of your father;'—and then she wept again. She bade me turn up the sleeve of my coat, that she might look for a well-remembered mark upon my

arm; and having carefully examined a scar upon my forehead, which had once been cut open by a fall, she exclaimed, 'It is—it is indeed my own long-lost Richard!' And clasping her hands together, she fell upon her knees and returned fervent thanks to her Maker for having allowed her to live long enough to see me restored to her."

Augusta was visibly affected by this part of her cousin's narration. He paused; and before he resumed his history, he raised the curls that shaded his brow, and showed her the mark of a deep cut, which was in general completely concealed by them.

"Susan Leary's first idea," he continued, "was, that I should instantly declare my real name, and take proper measures to obtain possession of my mother's estates. The little property my father had originally inherited, had, she well knew, been long ago squandered away either by him or by my brothers. I informed her, however, that such was not my intention; that I was quite rich enough already not to wish for any acquisition of fortune: that I knew and respected Mr. Mordaunt and all his family, and that nothing but absolute necessity should ever induce me to disturb them in the enjoyment of that wealth which was so worthily

bestowed upon them. I said, 'that I did not mean to relinquish the name I had so long borne; and that, in gratitude to Mr. Stafford for having brought me up kindly, and conferred many benefits upon me, I had determined to shield his memory from disgrace, by keeping his secret very strictly.'

"Susan did not look quite pleased with this explanation; but when I told her I hoped she would come to England, and establish herself in one of my cottages at Blossomdale, her countenance brightened, and she replied, 'that I was very good; that she would think about it; but that she would much rather have lived in a cottage near my house at Mordaunt.' After she found that Raymond stood high in my favour, he rose proportionally in hers; and she confessed, between joke and earnest, that *he* had proved a better friend to me after all than *she* had done. He told her of my former engagement to you, and hinted how very miserable he feared I had been since it had come to an end. You must forgive her, if I add that she blamed you and pitied me; and that when she expressed her feelings pretty strongly to me upon the subject, I found it impossible to make her hear reason, and to persuade her that *I* had been the person in fault. I am afraid

that her manner towards you, when you met her at Mordaunt, must have been anything but courteous?"

"It certainly was very repulsive," replied Augusta, "and, as I then thought, very strange. Many of her remarks, too, were perfectly incomprehensible to me at that time; but I can understand their meaning well enough now."

"I stayed a good while in Ireland," pursued Mr. Stafford: "I felt a curiosity to revisit my father's former abode, and to wander over the now desolate scenes of my early childhood. I went also to see the place Mr. Stafford had purchased, and which *I* had sold: it has passed into the hands of an absentee, and the house is beginning to fall into decay. While I was in that neighbourhood, Raymond suggested to me that it might be a satisfaction to my mind to disinter the little Stafford's remains. I agreed that it would undoubtedly add another link to the clear chain of evidence he had already brought forward, if the boy's body could be found; but that, should it have been accidentally removed, my reliance in the truth of all he had told me would continue unshaken. He thanked me for the confidence I placed in him. His quick invention supplied him with a plausible tale of some criminal who before

his execution had confessed, among other crimes, 'that, while he was wandering about Ireland as a beggar, he had murdered his young nephew in a fit of passion, and had buried him beneath a grotto in a gentleman's garden.' This transaction was supposed to have occurred many years ago, and Raymond pretended that he could never exactly make out the name of the place where it had happened, but, from the description the man had given of it, that he imagined it must have been at Mr. Stafford's. He recounted the story to the person who had now the care of the house, and asked him if he had any objection to allow him to examine the old grotto. The permission he desired was very easily granted, and, accompanied by the present proprietor's servant and myself, Raymond prepared to undertake his search. The little building was in a very ruinous state; but as soon as he raised the boards which had formed the floor, we discovered the mouldering bones of a child hidden beneath them: they appeared to have been wrapped up in a sheet, but this covering had fallen to pieces from decay; some small portions only of it remained, and upon one of these I perceived that Mr. Stafford's crest and cipher had been printed

in indelible ink. I have that curious fragment still in my possession. I silently pointed it out to Raymond, and then observed aloud, 'that as he had now satisfied his curiosity, and as the miserable wretch whose conduct had excited it had already been sent by the offended laws of his country to render an account of his crimes in another world, there would be little use in making any farther investigation about this deed of darkness.' Our companion acquiesced in my opinion, and perhaps the more willingly, because he might not feel quite sure that his master would like to hear of the search he had just permitted. I told him, however, to note down in his recollection the discovery we had made, and to hold himself in readiness to come forward and state it, in case he should ever be called upon to do so.

"We did not restore the bones to the situation in which we had found them; but, upon the servant's declaring that he had accidentally turned them up with his spade, he obtained leave to have them buried in consecrated ground."

Mr. Stafford paused for a moment. "I have now communicated to you," he concluded, "everything I myself know about my own his-

tary; and I hope I have convinced you, that in venturing to assert my near relationship to your family, I have been no impostor."

"Mr. O'Donnel," replied Augusta,—and she pronounced that name very distinctly,—"I will not even pretend to disbelieve that you are the rightful and undoubted heir of Mordaunt." She stopped; her utterance seemed completely checked, and for a length of time they were both silent.

"Will you not speak to me?" said Mr. Stafford at last, in a tone of deep mortification. "Will you not deign me even one word to terminate a suspense I am no longer able to endure?"

Augusta started, and rousing herself from the painful sort of reverie into which she had fallen, she replied,

"You expect me to return an answer to your proposition, and I feel that I ought to do so. I cannot consult my parents or my brothers; I dare not impart to them your fearful secret, lest their affection for me should induce them to counsel—to insist upon my following a different course from the one it is my intention to pursue. I must not place my happiness in the balance against that of so many others whose comfort is far dearer to me than

my own. I have made my decision," and she held out her hand to her cousin as she pronounced these words,—" I have no heart to give you, but I faithfully promise that my hand shall be yours, if you can reconcile yourself to the idea of accepting it upon these terms."

Mr. Stafford instantly raised the reluctant hand to his lips, and poured forth expressions of the warmest gratitude and delight. But Augusta looked at him with such a mixture of despair and contempt, that his raptures were suddenly checked, and a cloud of shame and grief came over his countenance.

" I see that you hate and despise me," he exclaimed, " and I cannot bear to see it. You do me injustice: if you knew everything—if you were aware how I am circumstanced, you would perceive that, in pressing this painful sacrifice upon you, I am not quite so *exigeant* as you suppose; you would discover that I have no alternative."

He drew a long breath, and then continued :— " Augusta, you *shall* know everything. My retaining the possession of my present affluence depends entirely upon my marriage with *you*. If you had persisted in refusing to unite your fortune with mine, I should have been a ruined man; and, in that case, I should reluctantly

have been driven to the necessity of asserting my claim to the Mordaunt estate."

Miss Mordaunt observed, in a faint voice, "that she could not understand how that could be: that she was at a loss to imagine how his marriage with *her* could in any way secure to him, or deprive him of his fortune."

"I will explain it to you very clearly," he said, "though in so doing I must expose my own unpardonable weakness. You cannot have forgotten that morning when you allowed me to see you for the first time, after you had made me perfectly happy by accepting my vows of deep and unalterable affection. I met you with a heart bounding high with hope, and love, and joy; but I was petrified when I remarked the mortifying alteration of your whole manner towards me. It was evident that you had repented your engagement; and, in the pride and bitterness of wounded feeling, I was very near telling you, 'that, if you wished it, I was quite willing to release you from it.' The delicate state of your health alone deterred me from speaking my mind to you at that time, and induced me to reserve my reproaches till some future opportunity. Your mother perceived my vexation, and partly succeeded in appeasing it; but still I was miserable, and I was angry.

"I was, as you know, much *lié* with all the Mortimers; and, as I walked home, I unfortunately met Philip. I was just then in no humour to enter into conversation with anybody, but it was impossible for me to avoid speaking to him. I had not seen him since the water-party to Richmond; he shook hands with me more warmly than usual, and congratulated me upon my approaching marriage. I suppose I did not receive his congratulations very graciously; for he stared in my face, and asked what was the matter with me? remarking, 'that I looked marvellously grave for a person under my happy circumstances, and that I seemed already to have come to a very *serious* sense of the importance of the awful step I was about to take.' I assured him a headache was the only thing that ailed me; and that, although it might have had an unbecoming influence upon my appearance, he would find that it had had no depressing effect upon my spirits. In short, I attempted to laugh off his suspicions; but this did not succeed with so acute an observer as Philip Mortimer.

"'Do not talk to me of a *head*-ache,' he replied; 'say a *heart*-ache, which will be nearer the truth. My dear Stafford, you need not expect to impose upon *me*. I am certain, from

the twist of your mouth, from the contraction of your brow, that something has gone wrong between you and your lover:' and he placed his arm within mine as he concluded these words.

He well knew how to insinuate himself into my confidence, and he soon contrived to draw from me a minute account of the visit I had just made to you. He declared that I was rendering myself causelessly wretched;—ridiculed what he called my sentimental misery;—told me I expected too much from my promise,—that we could not claim it of modern young ladies to be always smiling and delightful, even to their affianced husbands;—that I had found you nothing more nor less than very far from well, and a little cross and capricious; and that he had no doubt you would prove extremely agreeable and angelically good-humoured the next time I called upon you. When we parted, he said he was engaged to dinner; but he asked me to meet him in the evening at a gaming-house at the west end of the town.

"I always liked play to a certain extent, yet it had never been my practice to risk large sums. That night, however, the feverish excitement of my spirits urged me to plunge more eagerly than usual into what was going forward around me. I staked highly, I betted

desperately, and I was unfortunate. Philip Mortimer, who is professionally a gambler, encouraged me to go on by his example, while he pretended to caution me to tempt my luck no farther. 'Stafford,' he whispered, 'you are dashing too wildly, you will burn your fingers; take the warning of a friend—you are not quite aware what you are about to-night.'—'My head is as clear as yours is, thank you,' answered I aloud; 'and to prove this, I now challenge you to try your skill and your fortune against mine.'—Philip looked hurt, but he did not decline the trial. We played for several hours; everything went unfavourably for me; he begged repeatedly that we might stop, but I was deaf to his entreaties upon this subject; and at last I lost so enormous a sum, that I found I had reduced myself to absolute beggary.

"I rushed home in a state bordering upon frenzy. Philip would not be persuaded to leave me, as he said I was not in a condition to be trusted alone; and I suffered him to accompany me, because I felt unequal to the effort of insisting upon shaking him off. As soon as I entered my own room, I threw myself into a chair, covered my face with both my hands, and at that moment the dread-

ful idea of self-destruction presented itself to my mind.

"Philip made no attempt to disturb my meditations for some time; at length he endeavoured to reason with me, but I refused impatiently to listen to him. 'You will hear me when you are calmer,' he observed,—'when you come again to your senses. You are now making mountains of mole-hills, and terrifying yourself out of your wits at a phantom which will vanish, like all other evil apparitions, when the first ray of light beams upon your understanding. In plain English, it can be of little consequence to you to have lost a large sum of money, if you do not find yourself obliged to pay it.'

"'This is talking to me as if I was a child,' I exclaimed in a furious voice, while my whole frame trembled with indignation. 'Philip Mortimer, I have allowed you to ruin me, but I will not permit you to insult me.'—'I never had the least intention of doing so,' replied he coolly. Then after a short pause he added, 'In spite of all you told me this morning, you still love Miss Mordaunt, do you not?'

"At this question a thrill of agony struck through my heart; your cruelty and my own anger were alike forgotten, and I thought only

of the impending misery of being compelled to relinquish your promised hand. I literally groaned in spirit as I answered, 'Do I still love her, did you say? I never can cease to love her! But why need you torture me with that inquiry now?'—'Then I am to understand,' he continued in the same unaltered tone, 'that you yet wish to marry her?'—'You must know that I ardently wish it; but that hope is at an end——'

"'Gently, gently,' said Philip, 'you are going too fast: you have admitted that it is *your* wish to lead *la belle Auguste* to the altar: I will now inform you, that it happens to be *my* wish also that you should do so. Therefore, to smooth away all difficulties, I make you a present of the sum I have won from you to-night, as her marriage-portion.'"

While her cousin related these last circumstances, Augusta reddened and became violently agitated; she struggled, however, to repress her emotion as much as possible, and Mr. Stafford thus proceeded:—

"I looked at Philip without being able to comprehend the full import of his words; he perceived this, and hastened to bring them down to the level of my bewildered understanding.

"'You surely could not believe,' he remarked, 'that I seriously intended to fleece you of your wealth? I knew you were labouring under that awkward mental malady vexation of spirit; I saw it had rendered you recklessly desperate, and that you were galloping forward, *tête baissée*, along the high road to ruin. To check you in your course I was aware would be impossible; so I took you in hand myself, to prevent your playing with anybody else,—and many there were who would not have felt scrupulous about winning your money. I gave you your head, and humoured your madness to its wildest extent, by letting you name your own stake, and imagine you were throwing away your countless thousands. To cut the business short, I perceived you were in danger; I hazarded a little friendly *ruse* to save you, and it succeeded. Your fortune is still your own; and now, can you forgive me for the fright I have occasioned you?'

"I was delighted with Philip's kindness and generosity; I no longer doubted that he had been a true friend to me, and I was indignant with myself for having condemned and mistrusted him. 'Can you forgive *me*,' I exclaimed, 'for my injustice towards you? You have acted as my guardian angel, and I can never

cease to remember your kindness, or forget the horrible warning I have received.' — 'It has truly been a sharp lesson to you, my dear Stafford,' he replied; 'it made even *me*, hardened wretch as I am, shudder to see you writhing under it! But it is over now,' he added more gaily, 'and we will think of the future. I have my own reasons for being anxious to secure Miss Mordaunt's happiness'—I fancied he smiled as he pronounced these words,—'and as, besides having the general character of being rather *volage*, you seemed half inclined to repent your engagement to her, I must now, for the young lady's sake, for your sake, and for my sake, require you to give me a solemn promise that you will keep it.'—'That I will do most readily,' I exclaimed, 'and in any form of words you may think proper to suggest.'—'Thank you,' he said.

"There were writing materials upon my table, and he sat down, and in a joking sort of way began to draw out what he termed 'an agreement of a right amicable nature' between us. His manner, as it then appeared to me, was gay and careless; and his pen seemed to run on as rapidly as possible. When the document was finished, he read it to me aloud, desiring me to look over his shoulder as he proceeded, to see

turned to you upon the day of your marriage. And, since we have settled all our *business*, will you allow me to ring the bell for some soda-water? I feel dreadfully thirsty.'—Something stronger than soda-water was immediately ordered, and we separated, professing ourselves better friends than ever we had been.

"I felt much need of rest, but it was long before I could compose myself to sleep; and when I did at last close my eyes, I was disquieted by unpleasant dreams. I got up very late the next day; and, as soon as I had breakfasted, I proceeded to your father's house. You received me more kindly than you had done the morning before; I encouraged myself to hope that all would still be well, and I hurried forward the arrangements for our union with joyful alacrity.

"After the bitter disappointment which blighted all my prospects of happiness, I had too many other distressing subjects of reflection to think of the agreement I had made with Philip Mortimer—indeed I considered it as a jest, and never apprehended that it would give me any uneasiness. Then came Raymond's disclosure; and, in the multiplicity of interesting investigations which occupied me in Ireland, I quite forgot everything about the debt I had

contracted, and the consequences that might result from it.

"One of the first persons I met after I returned to town was Philip Mortimer. Having made a few preliminary remarks, 'I do not presume,' he said, 'to ask you *how* your marriage with Miss Mordaunt went off — that is no affair of mine, but I suppose that it is gone off?' I assented to the sad truth of this supposition. 'Well, then,' he continued, 'if you take my advice, you will endeavour to bring it on again, if it is possible. I do not desire to be impatient, or to put you to any unnecessary inconvenience; but you are aware that time flies fast, and that in little more than two short months the year will have expired.'—'What year?' I exclaimed: 'what is it that you mean?'—'You cannot surely have forgotten the terms of our agreement?' he replied. 'I have had an unusual run of bad luck this spring; I have also been annoyed by heavy demands upon my purse; and, to speak plainly, if you do not contrive to gratify me in the little whim I have taken of wishing to see you united to Miss Mordaunt in the holy bands of wedlock, I cannot afford to be generous enough to cancel your debts.'

"I felt too much astonished to answer him

for a minute or two. At length I tried to remonstrate with him. 'You told me,' I observed, 'that you did not consider me in my sober senses when I lost that money to you.'—'Very likely I might,' answered Philip with provoking calmness and self-possession: 'but I think you will not pretend to deny that you were quite in your sane mind when you afterwards voluntarily signed the bond which I have now in my writing-case. You may assure yourself that it is not my intention to press your engagement harshly upon you, but I will not be trifled with;—you are pledged in honour to abide by it, and the long and short of the business is, that you must either marry the lady or pay me the money.'

"I stood aghast, for dismay and indignation had deprived me of utterance. 'You need not,' said my tormentor in a more insinuating tone, 'look so despairingly wretched—so wofully as if you considered yourself already placed upon the scaffold, and saw in me the hateful executioner standing beside you to strike the fatal blow. Your case is not yet completely desperate: Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter are expected in town next week, and the latter may perhaps be persuaded to reward your persevering constancy.'

"I had neither temper nor inclination to prolong this discussion. I left my companion abruptly, and shut myself up alone to try to devise some means of extricating myself from the distressing embarrassment in which his artifice and my own folly had entangled me. No expedient presented itself to my imagination except the obvious but hopeless one which Philip had pressed upon me. In spite of myself, it rose up perpetually before me; my fancy whispered, that if I could only persuade you to bestow upon me your hand, all the difficulties that oppressed me would be cleared away, and Mr. Mordaunt would also be enabled to retain undisturbed possession of my maternal estate. It was then, while these thoughts were passing and repassing in my mind, that I was first struck with the idea of confiding to you my secret, and attempting to prevail upon you to save all your family from ruin; and to rescue, by an effort of unparalleled generosity, your worthless and unfortunate cousin from impending misery.

"I waited impatiently for your arrival in London. I dared not call upon Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt until after I had met you in society; and when I was informed by your servant this morning that your mother was not at home, I

thought myself particularly fortunate in having found the opportunity I had so much wished for, of being able to see and talk to you in private."

Augusta was extremely shocked by the base and unprincipled cruelty of Philip Mortimer's conduct; and she would perhaps have been inclined to feel considerable pity for Mr. Stafford, if she had not believed he had himself behaved in a similar manner towards a person far more interesting to her. As her recollection involuntarily reverted to that person, a startling doubt flashed suddenly across her mind, and she determined at once to clear it up.

"You said just now," she remarked, "that you were not in the habit of playing very deep. Was the money you lost to Mr. Mortimer the largest sum you ever hazarded in that way?"

"I truly assure you that it was. I had in no former instance risked anything to be compared to it; and I am certain that I shall in future carefully avoid repeating so fearful and dangerous an experiment."

Augusta's agitation increased painfully as she thus pursued her interrogation:—

"Did you not"—she could scarcely get out the words,—"Did you not once win almost a

fortune—of—Lord Delmore?" She took breath, and then added very earnestly, "Tell me truly, I conjure you!"

Mr. Stafford started, and his brow contracted at the mention of that name; but he replied with every appearance of perfect candour and sincerity,

"On my honour, no. If you have heard this of me, you have been misinformed." He paused. "I bear Lord Delmore no particular good will, and I am aware that he dislikes me; yet I will do him the justice to declare that I never met him in a gambling-house in my life. I have been told, that when he was very young, he had a passion for play, and that he played unluckily; but, if such was the case, I really believe that his losses cured him of his unfortunate propensity, and that he entirely gave up all his gaming practices."

"Then I have been deceived!" exclaimed Augusta.—"Oh, how wickedly deceived!" and she burst into a violent flood of tears. "Yet, agonising as this discovery is," she continued, after a few moments' reflection, "it is less heartbreaking to find that his character is cleared from so dark an imputation—to know that he is blameless, than still to think him guilty of contemptible, unprincipled meanness.

His honour is unsullied, his conscience is not burthened by the remembrance of any degrading fault, and *he* may yet be happy!"

The cloud which had once been dispelled, gathered again more darkly upon Mr. Stafford's countenance; Augusta perceived it, and it recalled her to a recollection of her actual situation.

"You must forgive me, Mr. O'Donnel," she said, "if I have allowed my thoughts to be for a short time engrossed by one whom I must now endeavour to teach myself to think of no more. I feel much obliged to you for having so fully and openly satisfied my curiosity; and, believe me, the generous manner in which you have just spoken of my brother's friend has raised you more highly in my estimation than any circumstance of your former life." She stopped short, blushed, and looked confused; for she felt that, while she intended to say something gratifying to her cousin, she had involuntarily been betrayed into expressing the deep interest she took in all that regarded Lionel, and the pride and delight she experienced in hearing his character vindicated from reproach.

Mr. Stafford was partly conciliated, yet he could not wholly conceal his mortification; and

Augusta, who had watched the workings of his features for some time, at length took courage to speak to him.

"You have set me an example of confidence," she began; "and to prove to you how much I admire it, I am now going to follow it. It will, I am afraid, be unpleasant to *you* to hear what it will cost *me* a very painful effort to tell: but it is better—it is right, that all should be told. It will, perhaps, be no great surprise to you to learn that I have been long, but secretly, attached to Lord Delmore."

Mr. Stafford turned away his head as she uttered these last words; he did not probably choose that she should see how violently they had affected him; and he asked her in as calm a tone as he could command, "if Delmore himself was aware of this flattering preference? if he entertained any suspicion of his own happiness?"

"I think—I hope not," replied Augusta. "A wicked and designing person contrived mutually to mislead us, and to make us judge falsely of each other. It was a feeling of desperate pique against Lord Delmore which induced me unadvisedly to accept your first proposal. When my indignation subsided, I confess that I repented my engagement; but

I did not dare to acknowledge this even to mamma; and I should not have shrunk at last from fulfilling it, if the same artful enemy who had led me into the snare, had not had recourse to another stratagem to secure the impossibility of my escaping from it. Her plot was well imagined; but the effect it produced was exactly the reverse of the one she had intended it to have. By ingeniously perverting a fact you have yourself related, she deceived me into a belief that your conduct had been much baser and more blameable than I have now discovered that it really was; and I consequently determined that no consideration should induce me ever to marry either you or Lord Delmore."

"The insidious deceiver who treacherously calumniated me and every one else," exclaimed Mr. Stafford, in a voice of uncontrolled anger, "must have been Lady Caroline Mortimer! Beneath the beauty and grace of an angel, that woman conceals the malice and cruelty of a demon. Will you have the goodness to inform me distinctly what accusation her ladyship was pleased to bring against me?"

"I own that you have not been mistaken in your conjecture," rejoined Augusta; "and I have already told you that I have become well

acquainted with the danger and duplicity of Lady Caroline's character. But ask me no more questions, I beseech you, about the nature of the unworthy proceeding she laid to your charge; for indeed I cannot—I am not at liberty to answer them. I am perfectly convinced that she traduced you; yet, before she made me the communication, or I had the least idea that it related in any way to *you*, she exacted from me a solemn promise that I would never reveal what she was about to impart to me. I was strictly enjoined to keep her disclosure inviolably secret even from my parents, and I have done so."

"Abominable hypocrite! false-hearted traitress!" muttered Mr. Stafford. "How kindly she affected to interest herself in all my concerns! How blindly I was fool enough to trust to her professions of friendship, and to allow myself to be guided by her dangerous counsel! She and her amiable brother Philip have laboured assiduously to promote my happiness; for which I feel quite as much obliged to them as they deserve that I should do. Thanks to their friendly interference, *I* shall be so fortunate as to win a beautiful and charming bride,—to accomplish the first wish of my heart, by uniting myself to the much-admired

object of my affections. But I greatly doubt if *Lady Caroline*, with all her boasted *adorateurs*, will ever succeed in securing a husband; and still more, if she will be able to melt the flinty bosom of the obdurate relation whom it has long been the dearest point of her ambition to prevail upon to marry her."

As Mr. Stafford concluded these bitterly ironical, but inaudible words, Augusta heard Mr. Mordaunt's well-known knock. She started from her chair, and the greatest agitation and alarm were depicted in her countenance.

"Papa is come home!" she exclaimed. "He is coming up-stairs; and I dare not—I am not in a state to see him now."

She looked anxiously and irresolutely towards the door, retreated a few steps, and then stopping, with a sudden effort of desperate determination, she added in a firmer tone,

"Mr. O'Donnel, my father will find *you* here. You had better inform him at once of all you think it right that he should know. You have my permission to tell him of the promise I have given you to become your—wife. We both clearly understand the terms upon which this promise was given; and as *I* am resolved to adhere to them truly, let me so-

lemnly conjure you always to keep them with equal sincerity and good faith."

Mr. Stafford bent his knee, and called Heaven to witness how firmly she might depend upon his faithfully fulfilling all the conditions of their agreement, and upon his devoting his whole future life to endeavouring to promote *her* happiness, and the comfort of all her family.

Augusta turned away from him.

"We must not part," he continued, "till I have thanked you a thousand times for the kind permission I have just received from you to make known my good fortune to your father. And, dearest Augusta, do not let me again hear you call me *Mr. O'Donnel*—I detest that name; I do not like to think of the misery and ruin it would have entailed upon myself and others, had I been compelled to bear it; and I now joyfully renounce it for ever."

By this time Mr. Mordaunt had reached the top of the stairs. He had felt much surprised when his servant told him that Mr. Stafford was in the drawing-room with Miss Mordaunt: his curiosity led him immediately to join them; but just as he entered the room at one door, his unhappy daughter darted out of it through another, and he found the guest alone.

CHAPTER V.

To-night, Zuleika, thou shalt hear
My tale, my purpose, and my fear:
I am not, love! what I appear.
* * * *
Zuleika, mute and motionless,
Stood like that statue of distress
When, her last hope for ever gone,
The mother harden'd into stone;
All in the maid that eye could see
Was but a younger Niobé!

LORD BYRON.

MRS. MORDAUNT did not return from her drive till very late; she found her husband waiting in the drawing-room to receive her, and there was a peculiar expression in his countenance which seemed to indicate that he had something of importance to communicate. She did not, however, at the first glance perceive this; and after looking round for her daughter, she inquired,

"Where is Augusta? I have brought her a beautiful nosegay; and I am afraid my poor

friend's flowers will be faded before night, if she does not immediately put them into water. They begin to droop already."

"Never mind the flowers," replied Mr. Mordaunt; "and as for the young lady they are intended for, I have not seen her since you went out. But sit down, Augusta," (he did not now very often call her by that name,) "I have a piece of news—good news for you, that will astonish you excessively. I can yet scarcely believe it myself, although I have full and sufficient assurance that it is perfectly true. No less a person has been here during your absence than our former friend Mr. Stafford. Considering all things, his visit in itself appears very extraordinary; but this marvel is trifling, compared with the consequences that have resulted from it. Wonder of wonders! the delightful, insinuating youth has contrived to make his peace with Augusta! All old disputes are settled between them; and he has been commissioned by his lady-love to declare to me that she has consented to renew her original engagement with him, and to take him for better or for worse. Of course, I readily agreed to sanction the alliance, and I ventured to assure the happy swain that you would do the same. I confess, he looked extremely fool-

e began his explanation; it was him that Augusta did not see him at oment, for his awkwardness, hesitation, embarrassment, were far from becoming. roughout the whole story I cannot say that I found him disposed to be particularly unreserved or communicative, and once or twice his odious likeness to O'Donnel struck me so forcibly, that I thought him the most disagreeable fellow I had ever beheld. However, it is of little consequence whether he pleases *my* fancy or not, since he seems at last to have pleased that of my daughter. I took care to ask him no indiscreet questions; I only intimated to him that a lover's quarrel might be looked over once, but that there must not be any second running back: and I hope you will impress the same thing very strongly upon Augusta's mind."

Mrs. Mordaunt's astonishment absolutely prevented her from speaking for some moments.

"It is very strange!" she exclaimed at length; "really almost incredible! Mr. Stafford's behaviour the other night, as I mentioned to you afterwards, surprised me a good deal; but nothing puzzles me half so much as Augusta's now having accepted him. I am certain

she is still attached to Lord Delmore. There has been a *dessous des cartes* in her whole conduct which I have never been able to understand. It is quite incomprehensible!"

"The wisest plan you can pursue, then," rejoined Mr. Mordaunt, "is to think of it no more: there can be no use in your perplexing yourself about it. Augusta is an independent young lady; she has judged and acted for herself, and she must abide by the consequences of doing so. Instead of consulting anybody, she chose, in an off-hand manner, to dismiss Lord Delmore, without even condescending to hear what he had to say;—therefore, I conclude that she did not wish to marry him. In the same precipitate sort of way, she has now thought proper to engage herself to Stafford; consequently, I imagine that she considers it will be agreeable to her to become his wife. I can only add, that I very sincerely hope he will make her a good husband, and that she will be comfortable and happy in the married state."

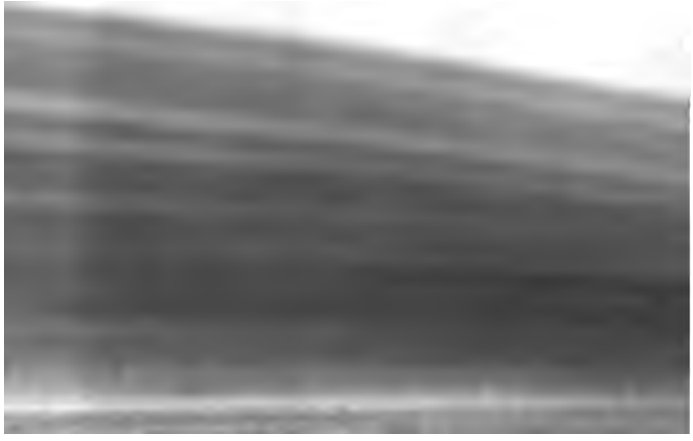
"I fervently wish that she may," said Mrs. Mordaunt, but it was in a tone which seemed to imply that she did not anticipate that she would. "I must see my dearest Augusta herself," she continued, "and hear her own account of all this." And, without farther delay, she

hurried anxiously up-stairs to her daughter's apartment.

Augusta had looked forward to this interview with great dread, and had attempted to arm herself to meet it with courage and composure. Her ideas were still too much perplexed to allow her to analyze very clearly the separate particulars and interests connected with the extraordinary and distressing circumstances in which she was placed. She had a general conviction that she had done her duty in consenting to sacrifice herself for her family; and, supported by this, she had resolutely curbed all feelings of regret, and had prayed earnestly for strength of mind. She wept not—no traces of grief were visible in her countenance, which had assumed an expression of calm fortitude; and had any one gazed upon her, as she sat thus alone, her features were so pale and motionless, that they might have been thought much less to resemble those of a living person than of a marble bust.

In spite of her resolutions, she half doubted, when she actually heard Mrs. Mordaunt's footstep, how she should be able to bear her affectionately penetrating glance: she did bear it, however, much more steadily than she imagined it possible she could have done. She had lat-





painfully she might expect to suffer in her progress.

"When is Mr. Stafford to come here again?" asked Mrs. Mordaunt rather drily.

"I don't know — he did not tell me, — I suppose he will most likely call here to-morrow morning."

"You will not probably now wish to go to Almack's to-night?"

Augusta had never recollected Almack's since Mr. Stafford's departure, and she certainly did not feel the least desire to go to a ball; yet she was so distressingly situated, that the noise and excitement of a public assembly appeared in prospect less alarming to her than the idea of spending a quiet evening at home with her mother.

"I am not sure if I should like to go out or not," she replied: "I will do just as you please about it, mamma."

"You had better please yourself, my dear; I only inquired what you wished to do; there can be no objection to your going out if you fancy it. But," concluded she more kindly, "you need not decide this question till the evening; it is now only time to begin your toilet for dinner."

she had come to her senses, and had got the better of her childish caprices, she talked and acted like a very rational creature;—that he began to perceive indications of spirit and character about her; and that he should not be surprised if she was metamorphosed at last into a very sensible woman."

Miss Mordaunt did not go to Almack's. Her mother observed to her, "that as she must have been much agitated by the occurrences of the morning, it would be wiser to retire to rest early."

Augusta thankfully availed herself of the permission to do so, but she found it impossible to sleep. During the long, tedious hours of the night, her thoughts had leisure to arrange themselves; and she recalled every circumstance of the curious secret her cousin had revealed to her. She saw much in his conduct to despise,—much to blame and to lament,—and something to pity.

She portrayed to herself the dismay her parents would have experienced, if it had been made known to them that Richard O'Donnel was alive, and preparing to demand his property. She imagined the bitter disappointment her brothers would have endured under their altered fortunes, and the distress into which

Lady Agnes Mortimer would have been plunged by such an unexpected reverse. For she was well aware that, although Lord Estonville might be glad to bestow his daughter upon the heir of Mordaunt, he would never allow her to unite herself to Captain Mordaunt when he possessed no recommendation but his personal merit. She also knew, that if Edward had been deprived of the prospect of succeeding to the Rectory of Mordaunt, he would have had little chance of obtaining any other preferment, and must consequently have relinquished the cherished hope of marrying Laura Stanley.

As these ideas came thronging upon her in rapid and vivid succession, it appeared to her excited fancy almost as if she had been raised up by Providence as the destined instrument of saving all those with whom she was most nearly and dearly connected from impending ruin. And so conscious did she feel of the perfect integrity of her own intention, that it never occurred to her that, by enabling her cousin to keep up the deception which old Mr. Stafford had successfully practised upon his wife's relations, she had in fact become a party in aiding and abetting him to withhold from them their lawful wealth. She never remembered that, although Richard O'Donnel was

undoubtedly at liberty to bring forward or to give up his own claim to the possession of his mother's estate, he could have no possible right to retain any property which he was aware ought in honour and justice to be restored to the late Mrs. Stafford's heirs.

Lord Delmore was naturally the subject of many of Augusta's reflections. She rejoiced at the vindication of his character; she admired—she esteemed, and perhaps it ought to be confessed that she loved him, more than ever she had done; yet she strove to feel thankful (and it was surely a magnanimous effort) that she had not sooner discovered how basely he had been traduced. She knew that if she had not believed him unworthy of her regard when he last came to Mordaunt, it would now have been no longer in her power to sacrifice her inclination to her duty. This consideration proved too much for her; her fortitude for an instant gave way, and she wept bitterly.

She was afterwards angry with herself for her weakness, and she determined to try to banish Lionel entirely from her thoughts. But this was no easy task; and at length she became so completely worn out by the variety and violence of her contending emotions, that she sunk into a deep and heavy sleep.

When Mrs. Mordaunt looked into her daughter's room the next morning, expecting to find her nearly dressed, she was surprised to see that she was not yet awake: she gazed at her for some moments, and believing that nobody else was anxious could sleep so comfortably, she left her with an agreeable conviction that all was quite right.

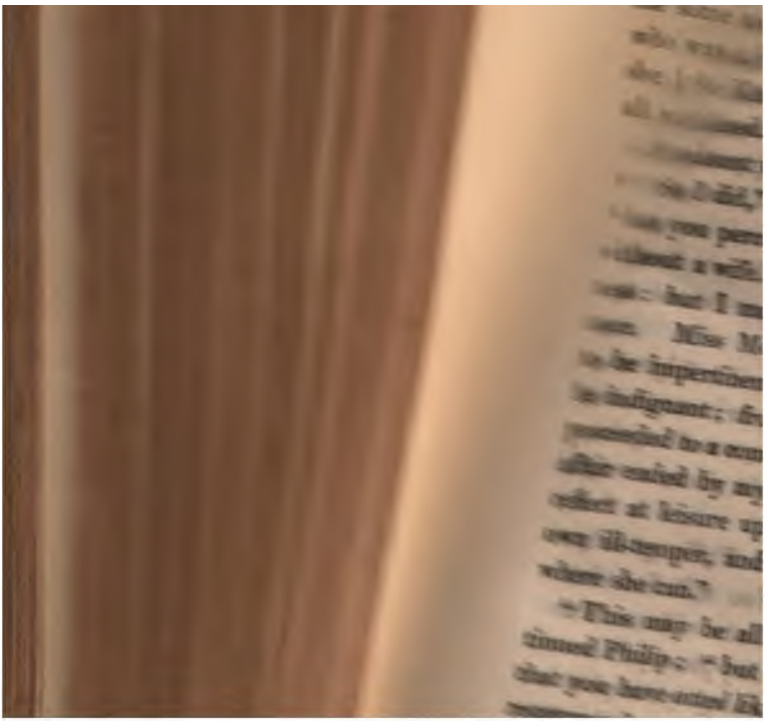
Augusta's earliest occupation after breakfast was writing a note to Lady Agnes Mortimer, in which she communicated to her her approaching marriage. She then wrote similar letters of announcement to each of her brothers and to Laura Stanley. In her despatch to the latter, she enclosed a little *billet* to Miss Stanley, which merely contained these words:—

These letters were all finished and sealed before Augusta met with any interruption from visitors, and it was a great relief to her mind when she had done them.

It is now time to return to Mr. Stafford.

The story he had told Miss Mordaunt of his having been stolen from his father's house, and the description he gave her of all the circumstances that occurred to him, during his childhood, were both strictly true. His account of the manner in which Philip Mortimer had contrived to win his money, and then to inveigle him into signing an acknowledgment of his debt, was also tolerably correct. But in the following part of his narration he had not spoken with equal veracity; we must therefore take the liberty of correcting his misrepresentations.

All had indeed gone smoothly till his quarrel with Augusta. The violent irritation of his mind at that moment banished all recollection of the fatal consequences that might result from the rupture of his marriage with her; yet, as soon as his resentment began to subside, and even during his journey back to town, he became sensible of the imprudence he had committed, and he felt very uneasy about the contract he had entered into with Philip Morti-



"Impossible!" cried Mr. Stafford. "After the manner in which she has treated me, it is quite out of the question that I can ever debase myself by making her any submission. Besides, I am certain that my doing so would be perfectly in vain. I am surprised, Philip, that you can think of advising such a thing!"

"I would by no means have thought of it, if I had not been desirous of getting you out of a bad scrape. Remember, Stafford, that yours is a compound case; you have made two engagements at the same time, and if you choose to break off one of them, you are bound to keep the other."

"Nonsense! You cannot succeed in frightening me in this way. The bond, or contract, or whatever it was, that I gave you, was all a joke, —and, as I have often thought since, a very silly one."

"There is no joke," said Philip gravely, "like a joke in earnest. You will find that the agreement you entered into with me was serious. I do not wish to hurry you—you have still many months left to arrange your plans; but, mark me well, if you do not contrive to make your match within the year you must positively pay forfeit."

Mr. Stafford perceived with dismay, that his

worst apprehensions were realized. He knew Philip Mortimer well enough to be aware that any appeal to his generosity would be useless; and he was conscious that if he attempted the bullying system with *him*, he should find him even more impenetrably proof against that sort of attack. The loss of his princely fortune, of his present flattering position in the world, and of all the indulgences he had been so long accustomed to enjoy, appeared inevitable. He shut himself up in his library in a state bordering upon despair, and as he cast his eye upon the luxuries that surrounded him, he railed desperately against the contemptuous cruelty of Miss Mordaunt's conduct, and bitterly cursed his own weakness in having allowed himself to become the victim of Philip Mortimer's unprincipled treachery.

Raymond, villain as he was, was attached to his master; and he immediately suspected, from the increased violence of his distress, that some fresh misfortune must have occurred to him since his arrival in London. Asserting the freedom to which he seemed always to think that his long services entitled him, he forced himself into Mr. Stafford's presence, and at length wheedled him into revealing to him the nature and extent of his embarrassment.

The wily old domestic was both shocked and startled by what he heard, and he did not at first repress either his exclamations or his reproaches. He walked up and down the room in extreme agitation for nearly ten minutes, as if he was revolving something in his mind; then suddenly stopping short just opposite to his master, he struck his forehead with his hand.

"I have decided to do it," he said, "at whatever risk it may be to myself. Mr. Stafford, you must not lose your fortune: Miss Mordaunt shall be forced to marry you, whether she likes it or not."

Raymond then proceeded to disclose to his astonished master who he really was, and to give him a detailed account of the plot in which he had himself acted so principal a part; and, in conclusion, he suggested to him, "that if he played his cards well, the possession of this secret might enable him to extricate himself from all his difficulties; for he never could believe it possible that Miss Mordaunt would be so silly and so naughty a young lady as to ruin herself and her whole family by persisting in her refusal to accept a good husband."

As a drowning man will attempt to save himself by catching at straws, so did Mr. Stafford eagerly grasp at the hope of delivering himself



instant,) I might apply to *you*; and that he thought you would not refuse to persuade your master to relieve me. I wish you had come here before he died, for he seemed to have something heavily upon his mind. Is that young Mr. Stafford?" she inquired, turning her eyes again towards her other visitor.

"Yes, it is; and I am sure that you will not solicit his charity in vain."

"Cannot he answer for himself?" muttered Susan. "May I be bold enough, sir," she continued, addressing herself pointedly to Mr. Stafford, "to ask you what has now brought you into this desolate part of the country?"

"I came to look at the property that belonged to my father; and I was also commissioned by some English friends of mine to make inquiries about a family of the name of O'Donnel, who formerly lived, as I understand, somewhere in this neighbourhood."

"It is his voice too!" ejaculated Susan, "only that it is milder and sweeter. Well may you inquire about the O'Donnels, sir, since I suspect that you are one of them yourself."

Mr. Stafford started violently.

"My good Mrs. Leary," interrupted Raymond, "if that was the case, my master must

indeed, as you observed just now, be a spirit returned from the dead; for you well know that all that family of O'Donnels, father and sons, have been dead long enough ago."

"Have they, Mr. Raymond? *All?*" And she fixed her penetrating glance upon him as she uttered these words.

He shrunk beneath it, and she added in a less fearful tone,

"Was not the late Mr. Stafford's son nearly the same age as Mr. O'Donnel's poor lost child Richard?"

"I believe he was. But what of that?"

"Why, then, the handsome young gentleman who stands before me now is no more Mr. Stafford than you are: he is my own dear, long-lamented Mr. Richard O'Donnel; and I am sure that he will not disdain to receive the blessing of his poor attached old nurse."

Mr. Stafford was much struck by the circumstance of Susan Leary's having so instantly discovered who he was. It gratified his vanity, and perhaps also revived some former feelings of affection towards her; he spoke to her very kindly,—made no attempt to deny his identity as Richard O'Donnel,—recounted to her his adventures,—enjoined her to keep his secret faithfully,—promised to settle a liberal provi-

sion upon her for life,—and gave her a handsome present in money before he left her cottage.

The poor woman's delight and gratitude may be more easily imagined than described: she said, "she felt as if she was in a dream—that she could not bring herself to believe that so much happiness had really fallen upon her."

Her recognition of Mr. Stafford was not, however, quite so extraordinary as it had appeared to him. Her husband, in his delirium, had frequently mentioned the lost child Richard O'Donnel, and had unconsciously thrown out hints that he knew him to be alive,—and that he had been carried away to a foreign land, from whence he would never come back to see his friends and his family; but that he was greater and richer than any of his brothers had been, and that he ought to have taken better care of those who had helped to make him so.

These ramblings made a deep impression upon Susan, but she carefully concealed them from everybody. Wretchedly poor as she was, she scorned the idea of supplicating assistance from a stranger like Mr. Stafford; for it never occurred to her that either he or his father could have been in any way connected with Richard O'Donnel's disappearance. It was not

till after she saw him with Raymond, and she had talked with the latter, that the whole truth flashed at once upon her mind.

Mr. Stafford visited her several times, and she procured him proofs to enable him, if he chose it, to establish his real birth and parentage. He remained a good while in Ireland, where he made a sort of tour; for he only wished to spend a few weeks at Blossomdale before he established himself in London.

If he carried his point with Augusta Mordaunt, he knew that it must be by a *coup de main;* he dreaded the consequence of allowing her too much time for consideration; and he thought he should have a better chance of success if he put off proposing to her his startling alternative until the year specified in his agreement was nearly expired.

The scheme he had decided to pursue was in some respects congenial to his disposition. It promised to allow him to revenge the insulting slight he had received from Miss Mordaunt and her family; to disappoint Philip Mortimer, and frustrate his unprincipled, extortionary plans; and, finally, to mortify and triumph over his rival Lord Delmore. Yet his better feelings occasionally upbraided him with the cruelty and meanness of exacting a compliance from

Augusta which he was conscious she would not voluntarily have accorded, and his vanity often revolted at the idea of dragging an unwilling bride to the altar.

He placed full confidence in Raymond's fidelity, but it was both disagreeable and degrading to him to feel how completely he was in that man's power. His conscience reproached him for the injustice of which he was guilty towards Mrs. Stafford's relations; and at times he felt so uncomfortable and so wretched, that he would thankfully have given up half his fortune to acquire the power of forgetting all that Raymond had revealed to him.

Considering the disquietude he thus endured, and the dread by which he was haunted that the fraud he was practising would some day be discovered, it may seem strange that he did not declare who he was, and assert his claim to his rightful inheritance. He had repeatedly been tempted to think of this; and he had even imagined that by so doing he might escape the necessity of paying his forfeit to Philip Mortimer, since he fancied that the fatal bond could be no longer valid if it was proved to have been signed by a false name. But there were eighty reasons which deterred him from taking straightforward course. The certainty of

losing all hope of marrying Augusta Mordaunt was not the strongest of these; for although he was still much in love with her, her conduct had offended him so deeply, that he almost despised himself for continuing to wish that she should become his wife.

It was the apprehension of being lowered in the public estimation that decided him to endeavour at all hazards to retain his present name and place in the world. It had been the labour of his whole life to make great friends, and to establish himself in what he deemed a good position in society; and he was convinced that, if he lost this enviable distinction, he should be miserable. He was very sensitive to ridicule, very anxious to know what was said and thought of him, and very much afraid of doing anything that might expose him to censure in a certain privileged set;—in fine, he was a perfect slave to the opinions of others—one of those weak characters who seldom or never possess the moral courage to judge for themselves, or to act as they naturally wish to do.

Mr. O'Donnel's name and family were as good or better than Mr. Stafford's, and there was nothing personally disgraceful to himself in the exchange that had been effected; on the contrary, it was rather an interesting history.

their original model." She even observed, "that, considering all circumstances, it might be desirable that this should be done with as little delay as possible."

Augusta's firmness and determination surprised Mr. Stafford without shaking his own purpose. He admired the magnanimity with which she had made up her mind to sacrifice all her personal feelings; but he had not sufficient generosity to imitate the noble example she had thus set him.

They were still engaged in earnest conversation, when Lady Agnes Mortimer was announced. Augusta turned very pale; and her friend started back when she perceived Mr. Stafford, whose countenance betrayed how disagreeably the name of Mortimer sounded in his ears;—in short, no three people ever looked more unpleasantly embarrassed. Lady Agnes was the first who recovered her self-possession.

"I beg your pardon for this intrusion, my dear Augusta," she said; "I thought you were alone, and I came to thank you for your kind note, and to offer you my congratulations."

"Although I am not alone," replied Augusta, in a trembling and agitated voice, "I assure you I am equally happy to see you; and



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She knew that Lady Agnes must be aware of her attachment for Lord Delmore, and had been extremely anxious to promote a union between them; and she had no doubt that she now despised her for the seeming heartlessness and inconsistency of her conduct, in having accepted a person she had often professed to her she could never like. She felt, it is true, a proud and almost indignant consciousness that the blame imputed to her was unmerited; yet still it was very painful to think that she had lost the good opinion of a friend she loved so affectionately. She was aware, too, that she had lost it irrevocably; since there was no possibility of her ever entering into any explanation of her own behaviour. "Charles, too, will condemn me," she said to herself; "and Lord Delmore, — what an object of contempt I shall become to him! Oh! if I was not supported by believing that I am doing my duty—that I am saving others from misery, I could not have strength to bear the bitterness of this dreadful trial!"

scending to the private gossip of the day, when a note was brought to Lady Estonville, who was engaged in conversation with other visitors.

"Lord Mortimer's servant waits for an answer, my lady," said the groom of the chambers, as he gave it to her.

The countess glanced her eye over the contents of the billet.

"Caroline," she observed, "I must trouble you to be my secretary. Will you just tell your brother that we shall expect him to-morrow?"

The answer was speedily written, and as Lady Caroline was twisting it up in her own peculiar manner, her companion, Lord Ashford, who had been watching and admiring the operation, marked to her,

"I had the pleasure of meeting Lord Mortimer at dinner yesterday."

"Had you? Oh, then I know where you dined."

"I want," continued his lordship, "to be introduced to Lady Mortimer; I am told she is so very pretty."

"Did you never see her?"

"I may have done so—I probably must have done so—a thousand times; but it was without being aware who she was."

"I will certainly take the earliest opportunity of presenting you to her: you will find her a great acquisition to your acquaintance."

"I perceive by your manner, Lady Caroline, that poor Lady Mortimer is not happy enough to be a favourite of yours."

"You are quite mistaken. I assure you I have a marvellous feeling of proper sisterly affection for her, and I duly appreciate all her merits. To do her justice, she has more domestic virtues than most people. She studies her dress from morning till night, no doubt for the very laudable purpose of pleasing her husband. Her children are so constantly the subjects of her thoughts, that she cannot help talking of them to every person she meets. If she were to come in here this instant, she would amuse *you* for the next half hour with descriptions of their beauty, and details of their various charming little accomplishments. Then she has such a benevolent, happy disposition, that she is always pleased, enchanted with everything and everybody; and such an amiable temper, that no excitement ever animates her sufficiently to ruffle it."

"What a delightful character!" said Lord Ashford. "With such a wife, your brother must be a happy man!"

"I really believe he is. He thinks her quite perfection; therefore he has been truly fortunate in his choice. Some little failings — faults I cannot call them—she certainly has; but these are the consequences of a neglected education. *Par exemple*, from having no idea of the value of money, she is rather apt to squander away larger sums than it is quite convenient to Mortimer to pay; and from not having attended properly to the study of her native language, she sadly misapplies her expressions. If she was describing to you her horse, she would tell you it was 'such a *darling!*' She said so the other day to Philip, who is rather absent, and who immediately asked her which of her children she was speaking of? Last night, when she was eulogising an ugly grenadier guardsman more than six feet high, I heard her exclaim, 'he is such a *love!*' Mortimer was present, and he ought to have admonished her not to praise a gentleman in such terms in future: it does not sound well; strangers might not be aware that she really never had any other love than her husband. She always talks, too, in superlatives:—this arrangement is '*too perfect!*' that friend is '*too charming!*' Such exaggerated admiration provokes me, it is so silly and so unmeaning: as if anything in this world can

right in my conjecture, I will just add that I suspect the bride's name begins with the first letter in the alphabet."

"Most assuredly it does; and if my intelligence has not happened to have been previously communicated to you, I confess that you have made out the puzzle very cleverly."

"It appears to me," observed Lord Ashford, "that Lady Caroline is endowed with the gift of second sight;—at least, she seems to know everything intuitively."

Philip smiled. "So I sometimes think. But as you probably feel impatient to learn who are the parties we have been alluding to, it is time I should gratify your curiosity. I suppose you know Stafford?—everybody does more or less;—and you most likely know Miss Mordaunt also?"

"Yes, I am acquainted with them both. Do you actually mean to say that *that* marriage is coming on again?"

"Indeed it is. I met Mr. Mordaunt in the street five minutes ago, and he stopped me to tell me that it was all settled yesterday. I imagine he was progressing towards this house to announce the event to my father: he looked very happy and very important."

Lord Ashford expressed his surprise loudly

but carelessly upon a subject that possessed no particular interest for him; but as it seemed to have engrossed Lady Caroline's whole attention, he soon took his leave of her, and went to circulate the news he had just heard among some of his other friends.

The moment he was gone, the brother and sister retired into the back drawing-room; and after the latter had taken the precaution of shutting the door, she exclaimed,

"So Augusta Mordaunt has really and truly condescended to forgive Mr. Stafford after all! I am dying with curiosity to hear the whole story. Do tell me how, in the name of Heaven, this reconciliation was brought about?"

"That is a question," replied Philip, "which has puzzled me very considerably, and which I am quite unable to answer. I have not seen Stafford himself, and you are already in possession of all the information I have yet obtained about the matter. One fact is assured to us beyond the possibility of a doubt,—the marriage is to take place: and that is all it is seriously important to us to know. It little signifies by what means the pacification has been effected:—it is no business of ours to inquire why they quarrelled, or how they made it up again."

"I confess that it is not; but it is pleasant to understand one's neighbours' affairs,—and I do not despair of being able to worm out this secret some day or other. In the mean while, I must thank you most gratefully, my dear Philip, for the very important service you have rendered me."

"Say not a word more about that. You know, Car, that it is always a great delight to me to succeed in accomplishing anything *you* wish; and in this instance I have the additional satisfaction of reflecting, that in forwarding your views I have materially benefited two other persons. I am extremely glad *la belle Auguste* is going to be so well and safely provided for; and it is a wonderful relief to my mind to learn that poor Stafford has brought his concerns to such a happy termination. 'All's well that ends well:' had he remained a bachelor at the expiration of the year, I should have found myself placed in rather an awkward situation,—and so would he. *He* was bound to pay what he had acknowledged to be a just debt, if *I* chose to demand it of him: but he might have guessed that I could never bring forward my bond against him if he thought proper to dispute it, since the whole transaction would not bear being exposed to the light.

He had a still stronger security too in my honour: gambler as I am, he might have supposed that I could not seriously intend to despoil him of a fortune I had confessed to have won from him under circumstances of unfair advantage. My stratagem was cunningly imagined, skilfully executed; and it has effectually answered the purpose of compelling him to make out his marriage with Miss Mordaunt."

"It has indeed," replied Lady Caroline; "nothing was ever more admirably managed. Mr. Stafford also has displayed some ability in contriving to propitiate his offended fair one."

"Much more," pursued Philip, "than I should have given him credit for. He has been in such excellent spirits ever since he returned to town, that I suspected he was meditating a coup d'éclat; but I greatly misdoubted its success. It is impossible to know what a man is capable of until he is actually driven to the test."

To elucidate this dialogue more completely, it is necessary to explain that Philip Mortimer had long been aware of his sister's attachment for their cousin Lionel, and had often privately rallied her with it both in joke and in earnest. Upon these occasions she had generally neither

admitted nor denied it; but when she heard that Lord Delmore had fallen in love with Miss Mordaunt at the Doncaster Races, she became so seriously alarmed that she could not help confiding her apprehensions to Philip; and it was in consequence of a preconcerted plan between them, that the latter contrived to excite Lionel's jealousy when he met Augusta at Estonville Castle.

The arts by which Lady Caroline afterwards managed to mislead both Lord Delmore and Miss Mordaunt have been already described: and likewise the ingenuity with which she attempted to entangle the latter in a flirtation with Mr. Stafford, and to encourage him to persevere in his attentions to a girl by whom she knew that he was disliked. As it was Lady Mary Carrington who communicated to her that her intrigues had been crowned with success, and that Mr. Stafford had proposed to his love and had been accepted, it may easily be imagined that Lady Mary had also been admitted into her sister's confidence. She had aided her in her schemes since her arrival in town, and her artful management had hastened on Mr. Stafford's declaration, at a moment when it was most likely to be favourably re-

He had a still stronger catastrophe, however, [illegible] gambler as I [illegible] only threatened to overpower that I could [illegible] actions.

spoil him of a f[illegible]embered that, on the morning was from him [illegible]ared, Lady Caroline received advantage [illegible]er brother Philip; and that, as guest, [illegible] had driven away her other guest, [illegible]self, they had a long private con[illegible]. He then told her, "that although Mr. [illegible] reported that he was engaged to *la* [illegible], many people who had witnessed [illegible] conduct of both during the scene at the [illegible]-house were inclined to bet that Lord [illegible] had the best chance of marrying her." [illegible] Philip added, it was his own opinion that [illegible] might easily carry off the prize if he [illegible] chose to come forward. "It must, therefore," he concluded, "be your care to endeavour to keep him in the background."

These hints rendered Lady Caroline very [illegible], and made her extremely desirous to see [illegible] as speedily as possible; but her anxiety was much relieved when she learned the next day that Lord Delmore had left London.

Towards the end of the week Philip again called her to an audience; and by his manner of doing so she felt sure that he had nothing disagreeable to impart to her this time.

Car," he began gaily, "when you
d my tale, I think you will admit that
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o your satisfaction. I have hazarded a
d stroke, and it has done the business. I
met him yesterday morning coming away from Mr. Mordaunt's, and looking so miserable and so indignant at the cruelty he had encountered from his promise, that he seemed half inclined to break off the marriage, and to have no more to say to her. I tried to argue him out of such folly; but when I found I could make little impression upon him in that way, I adopted another course."

And Philip then proceeded to detail those extraordinary particulars which it is unnecessary to repeat.

"Stafford has been so thoroughly frightened," he observed, "that he will now feel no disposition to resent Miss Mordaunt's unkindness,—at least, till after he is married to her. If all goes on smoothly, the bond will of course pass as a joke; but if he renounces his allegiance to the young lady, we must consider what is to be done with it. It may prove useful as a bugbear, and I shall take care to put him in mind that I have it safely in my possession."

hear her coming even now to account for herself."

And at that instant Lady Agnes certainly did appear. Lady Caroline looked at her very eagerly, and then exclaimed,

"Permit me to wish you joy, *ma sœur*, of the happy event which I understand is shortly to take place in your future family."

"Thank you for your kindness," answered Lady Agnes coolly: "I am just returned from congratulating Augusta."

And then addressing herself to her mother, she explained to her where she had been, and gave her many messages from Mrs. Mordaunt.

Charles Mordaunt's answer to his sister's letter arrived by return of post. It was short and stiff; he wished her every happiness she could expect, but it was evident that he was displeased and disgusted with the idea of her approaching marriage. He said, "he should probably see her in less than a fortnight;" but he expressed no satisfaction at the prospect of such a meeting.

"He despises me," thought poor Augusta, "and he scarcely takes the trouble of concealing that he does so:" and she wept bitterly at the great alteration she perceived in his style of writing to her.

To Lady Agnes, Captain Mordaunt confided his sentiments more openly. He observed, "that he was both astonished and mortified by his sister's conduct; that *he* had been quite mistaken in her character; that Lionel had read it more truly; and that since she had proved herself a coquette and a jilt, he trusted that his friend would now feel what a fortunate escape he had made in not having been united to her."

Edward's congratulations to Augusta were almost as brief as his brother's; but they were more kindly worded.

Laura Stanley touched warmly upon the interest she felt in her friend's happiness; the rest of her letter was filled up with commonplace sentences, and she had visibly been rather at a loss to know what to say.

"They all think me contemptible," reflected Augusta,—"and well they may. I suppose everybody who knows anything about me is of the same opinion. It is hard to be thus condemned; yet I have the comfort of feeling that I do not now deserve it."

There was one person, however, whose behaviour formed an exception to the general example, and whose approbation she valued particularly;—this was Miss Stanley.

Her letter to Augusta was at once natural and affectionate. She told her, "that she had been extremely gratified by the kindness of her note;" she owned that its contents had very much surprised her; but she said *she* knew her well enough to be perfectly satisfied that she had acted from praiseworthy motives; that she wished for no farther explanation of her conduct than the assurance she had given her that she had done what she believed to be right;" and she concluded by expressing a fervent hope that she would, after all her trials, attain the comfort and happiness, even in this world, which she so well merited.

Charles Mordaunt had already obtained a majority in an infantry regiment, as a preparatory step to his procuring an unattached lieutenant-colonelcy; and he now arrived in town with the expectation of seeing himself gazetted to the latter in the course of a few days.

Edward was also coming up from Oxford: Dr. Stanley was warned to hold himself in readiness to officiate at Miss Mordaunt's marriage; and Augusta requested Lady Agnes Mortimer and Laura Stanley to be her bridemaids.

It is true that her heart sunk within her as she watched the progress of the wedding pre-

parations; yet, instead of experiencing the sort of despair to which she had given herself up under somewhat similar circumstances the year before, she now endeavoured to submit with firmness to her fate. She had no self-reproaches to distress her; the keenest grief she suffered was upon Lord Delmore's account. "Perhaps it is better," she sometimes fancied, "that he should despise me; he will learn to forget me the sooner." She felt that if she had sacrificed her own happiness, she had secured that of others; and such a reflection sustained her under all her sorrows. In short, she found by experience, that in whatever painful circumstances a person may be placed, no one who conscientiously does her duty can possibly feel completely miserable.

Lady Caroline Mortimer's endeavours to discover how Mr. Stafford had contrived to induce Augusta Mordaunt to relent towards him, had hitherto been quite ineffectual. Lord Delmore had had an alarming relapse; and although he was again pronounced out of danger, all that her ladyship could ascertain about him from Major Mordaunt (who had been to visit him) was, that he and his mother were for the present determined to remain in the West of England. She feared Lionel would never recover

his health; she thought he was going into a decline; and her uneasiness was greatly augmented by the consciousness that his illness had been originally occasioned by her own cruel artifices.

After Charles came to town, Lady Caroline found a daily subject of mortification in witnessing the happiness of Lady Agnes. She could not bear to hear her sister's approaching marriage constantly spoken of; and a more thoroughly wretched being than her ladyship was at that period cannot well be imagined. Her apprehensions about Lionel preyed upon her spirits day and night; her conscience upbraided her unceasingly for her unprincipled conduct towards him, and she was tormented by the idea that he justly hated and despised her. Then, to augment her ill-humour, came her unnatural jealousy of Lady Agnes, and of everybody else who was less miserable than herself. She was even vexed when the preparations for Augusta Mordaunt's wedding were mentioned in her presence, although she knew that *she* was no object of envy, and although she wished for nothing more ardently than to see her Mrs. Stafford. In fine, her evil passions gained so entire an ascendency over her, that her temper was completely soured;



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ing a week with her family, her mother had been pronounced out of danger.

Lady Caroline Mortimer had never been in the habit of conversing much with her maid; but when she came back from the country, she could not do less than inquire how she had left her mother, and express a general hope that all her other friends were well.

Miss Barker thanked her ladyship for her kindness; said her mother was getting better very satisfactorily; and then observed, "that she had seen a very curious old relation of hers, who was just come over from Ireland. She is the strangest-looking person I ever met with, my lady: she was formerly nurse to Mrs. O'Donnel's children, and she has suffered great misfortunes, I understand. She is now staying with her brother, who is a cousin of my father's, and has been for many years the gardener at Mordaunt Park."

There was something in the few words her maid had spoken about this singular woman which struck Lady Caroline's fancy; she imagined she must be an original character, and she asked Barker what was her name, and desired her to tell her all she knew about her.

The account she received was in substance much the same as that one which had been

[illegible] Mordaunt by Mary Barker; but it was in many parts considerably embellished by the elegant colouring that was thrown over it by her partial cousin.

"Mr. and Mrs. Barker begin to be very much tired of their visitor, I suspect, my lady," she remarked in conclusion; "but she seems determined to stay on with them, and there is no knowing how to get rid of her. Mrs. Barker is a great favourite of Miss Mordaunt's, and she has sent a letter to her dear young lady, as she calls her, by me. She bade me deliver it to her myself, if I possibly could contrive it; for she said that it contained something of great importance, and that she would not have it fall into wrong hands for all the world. I guess that she has been writing to Miss Mordaunt, to ask her to contrive through her papa's interference to persuade Mrs. Leary to remove to a house of her own."

"Very likely," replied Lady Caroline carelessly. "Have you given the letter to Miss Mordaunt yet?" she added; "I am going to call upon her this morning, and I shall have no objection to take charge of it for her, if you wish it."

"I am sure I shall be very much obliged to your ladyship: I will go and fetch it as soon

as your ladyship is dressed." And she consigned the despatch accordingly to the treacherous care of her mistress.

"It is very extraordinary," thought Lady Caroline, "that the gardener's wife should have anything of great importance to communicate to Augusta Mordaunt! And I am afraid it does not appear much to the credit of the latter, that this woman should feel so apprehensive lest her letter should be seen by anybody but the person to whom it is addressed. If she happens to be engaged in any little innocent intrigue, she has certainly chosen rather a curious *confidante:* but clandestine correspondences are often carried on through the medium of very improbable agents."

Her ladyship examined the exterior of the letter very attentively, and thus pursued her train of thought:—

"If I look at the outside of this paper for ever, it will not enable me to discover the secrets it contains. I cannot rest satisfied until I have ascertained what is within; I must open it, and read it. There can be no great impropriety in my making myself acquainted with what is known to Mrs. Barker, and consequently to all the village gossips at Mordaunt, long before this time."

The letter had only been sealed with a wafer, and the state of the weather had kept this so moist that there was no difficulty in opening it. It had been folded very carefully; the penmanship was clear and good, and although many of the words were ill-spelt, the writer had evidently taken great pains in the composition of the whole: it was couched as follows:—

"For Miss Mordaunt.

"My honoured and dear young lady,

"I am afraid you will think it a great liberty in me to write to you; but having something of consequence to tell, I consider it is my duty to do so, and I hope you will not be offended with me. It was a sincere pleasure to me to learn that you was going to be married—I am glad of such good news for many reasons, and my husband and me trust you will not refuse to let us humbly give you joy. On my part, I assure you I pray for your happiness every night and morning of my life. Susan Leary is still with us, which is a great trouble to me, and if I had now been what I once was, I should have turned her out of doors long ago; but as it is, I try to bear with her. Poor woman! her distresses have ruined her temper, and I

sometimes fancy she is not always quite right in her head; but I have never mentioned this to any living creature out of my own house before. She is constantly quarrelling with her brother, because she says that he has forgot the old family for the sake of the present family, which everybody but herself must see is only natural and proper: and when she is alone with me—for she never speaks in that way when the neighbours or even the children are by to hear her—she strives to vex and provoke me in all the manners she can think of. She tells me that *her* friends will unexpectedly raise up their heads, and that *my* friends will suddenly be cast down; and makes all sorts of other spiteful and malicious remarks, which I do not care to repeat. What really does disturb me is, that she has frequently hinted to me very plainly that she knows Master Richard O'Donnel was not drowned as he was supposed to be, but is still living; and that he intends soon to lay claim to his property, and come and take away Mordaunt from your worthy papa. I am not so silly as quite to believe this, yet I do not know how altogether to disbelieve it; I am frightened at Susan's way of saying it, and I have felt very uneasy about it lately. There is another thing, too, that alarms me:

Susan had a letter brought her by the postman some little time ago which looked as if it came from a lady or gentleman, and she took it up into her own room to read it. When she and I were sitting together that evening, she pulled it out of her pocket, and holding it up close before my eyes, she bade me view that letter with respect, for that the dear gentleman who wrote it would be the master of Mordaunt Park before many more months were over our heads. By that I knew she meant me to understand that the letter was from Mr. Richard O'Donnel; but I made her no reply. She then kissed the paper, and threw it immediately into the fire, as if she was afraid that I should try to read it. —Now, my dear young lady, I hope and trust there is not any likelihood that Master Richard O'Donnel himself will ever come to life again to disturb your good family; but it seems to me that some evil-inclined person may have taken it into his head to pretend to be him, and may have quite imposed upon Susan. If this is the case, it is right that your papa should be informed of it directly, that he may take proper measures to discover the cheat.—I dare not be so bold as to write to Mr. Mordaunt, but I thought I might venture to write to you; and I shall esteem it a great favour if

you will take the trouble of letting him know all that I have now told you. I once thought of making a journey to London to speak to you; but when I consulted my husband about it, he laughed at me, and would not hear of my doing such a thing. *He* thinks Susan's fancies are all nonsense, and desires me never to repeat them to anybody; which I certainly never shall. He advised me not to mention them to you, as he said I should only be getting myself into trouble if I did—but I don't care for *that*—and giving his master unnecessary vexation, which I am sure I would not willingly do for all the world.—I must now conclude my long letter, begging you again very respectfully to excuse my great presumption in sending it; and with our humble duty to yourself and all the good family, and my prayers for your continued welfare, I remain, my dear and honoured young lady,

"Your very dutiful and obedient servant,

"MARY BARKER."

"P. S. I shall esteem it a great kindness and condescension, and it will take a heavy weight off my mind, if you will please to send me a few lines to say that this has reached you safely."

Lady Caroline Mortimer read Mrs. Barker's letter twice over with much attention, and after the second perusal she no longer entertained the slightest doubt that Richard O'Donnel was still in existence. The malicious satisfaction she felt at the idea of the distress that his appearance would bring upon the Mordaunts, perhaps inclined her the more readily to give entire credence to Susan Leary's mysterious hints; and when she had been considering the subject for some time, a new light burst upon her. She imagined that the secret of Mr. O'Donnel's preservation might by some means have been privately communicated to Augusta, and that her dread of finding herself involved in the ruin that awaited her parents had induced her to take a sudden resolution of making her peace with Mr. Stafford. This conjecture appeared to solve at once all that had hitherto seemed so incomprehensible in her conduct: but it never occurred to Lady Caroline that Mr. Stafford himself could possibly be connected with Richard O'Donnel, or with anything that personally concerned that mysterious character.

"This is a most marvellous discovery!" she muttered, as she folded up the letter and cautiously replaced the old wafer by a new one of the same colour. "Augusta can never find

out that I have perused her good friend's very pleasant epistle, and I will take especial care that she shall have the benefit of studying it herself without much farther delay. I feel amazingly interested in Richard O'Donnel — I long to learn more about him; he must be quite a *héros de roman*. If I could only contrive to get hold of Susan Leary, I would speedily persuade her to tell me the whole story;—but how is that to be effected?"

She mused for some time. — "I have devised a plan that will do very well. I know that Barker has some relations who live at Hampstead, and who would, I dare say, be easily induced to receive their cousin Mrs. Leary for a week or ten days. I can pretend to Barker, that Mr. Mordaunt is anxious to find an excuse for removing the good woman quietly and amicably from Mordaunt; and when she has arranged the preliminaries, I can make her write her an invitation from these people to come and visit them, with an offer to pay her travelling expenses if she will accept it. Her brother will be glad enough to advise her to avail herself of their kindness, — his wife will speed the parting guest; and if she afterwards chooses to return to them, *I* cannot help it— I shall at least have relieved them of her com-

pany for a little space. As soon as Mrs. Leary is domiciliated at Hampstead, I shall express a great curiosity to see her; and when she is actually within five miles of London, it will be hard if I cannot manage to have as many private conferences with her as I please."

Augusta Mordaunt was very much startled and distressed by Mary Barker's letter; she felt excessively alarmed at the possibility of Susan Leary's revealing the secret of her cousin's existence to any person less faithfully attached to her father's interest than her sister-in-law; and she thought with horror how dreadful it would be if the sacrifice she was going to make for her family should be made in vain, and the Mordaunt inheritance should be torn from them after all; — yet *that* she imagined could never happen. Mr. Stafford would be quite rich enough without it when he had freed himself from his embarrassing engagement with Philip Mortimer, and he would then have no temptation so cruelly to injure and deceive her. She resolved, however, to show him the communication she had received; to confess to him the fears it had suggested; and to request him to give her a solemn promise in writing, that no circumstances that might occur after their marriage

should dissolve the compact he had already entered into with her, or allow him to feel himself at liberty to disturb her father or any other member of his family in the possession of the Mordaunt estate.

Augusta spoke to Mr. Stafford upon this subject the very first time they met: it was a very unpleasant one to him, and he appeared so deeply hurt by her mistrusting his honour, that she felt half ashamed of herself for having done so.

"Since you seem to place so little reliance in my *word*," he said in a tone of bitter mortification, "I am very willing to give you any other *bond* you may consider more satisfactory;—though I own I have found cause to dislike the very name of written engagements. I assure you that *I* am quite as much annoyed at Susan Leary's indiscretion as *you* can be; and I shall lose no time in despatching Raymond to Mordaunt to remove her from thence. When that point is accomplished, I shall leave it to her own choice, either to establish herself in one of my cottages at Blossomdale, or to return to Ireland with a competent provision settled upon her for life: and the last plan is the one that I shall wish her to prefer."

After a long pause, Mr. Stafford continued.

tion she had so properly and considerately conveyed to them. She said that it should be carefully borne in mind, but that she had every reason to believe there was no danger to be apprehended from Mr. Richard O'Donnel, since she was convinced there was not any person of that name now living who would ever come forward to lay claim to the property of Mordaunt. She commended her for the strict secrecy she had observed about Susan Leary's strange fancies; praised her for the patience and forbearance she had shown towards her sister-in-law; and told her she suspected she would not much longer be tormented by the company of so disagreeable a guest, since she knew that it was the intention of one of her late husband's old friends to stop and see her in his way to Ireland, for the purpose of offering to convey her back to that country.

CHAPTER VII.

Shylock. — There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest.

SHAKSPEARE.

MR. STAFFORD'S measures were so promptly executed, that when Lady Caroline Mortimer prepared to open her scheme about Susan Leary to her maid, it was overthrown at once by Miss Barker's informing her she had just heard from her father that their strange relation had returned unexpectedly to Ireland with a gentleman who had come to Mr. Barker's to fetch her.

"How provoking it is that this old woman has thus escaped me!" thought Lady Caroline when she was left to her own reflections. "Her departure has deprived me of the only clue I possessed to enable me to make myself acquainted with Mr. O'Donnel's past adventures and future views. I cannot possibly send for Mrs. Leary from Ireland; and it is equally out of the question that I should go over to seek

her among her wilds. One thing is perfectly clear: Mrs. Barker's letter has given the Mordaunts considerable alarm, and has been the cause of her sister-in-law's sudden removal. If they were not previously aware of their cousin's inconvenient existence, they must entertain a pretty strong suspicion of it now, since they are afraid to allow an indiscreet old retainer of his mother's family to remain in the village of Mordaunt. Should she tell awkward tales elsewhere, they well know that they would prove less dangerous, as strangers would scarcely take the trouble of listening to them. My cautious friends have succeeded in baffling my curiosity for the present; but there are a thousand ways in which I can torment them, by giving them to understand I have already learned much more about their affairs than they would at all wish me to have done. Charles Mordaunt dines here to-day, and I will at least have the pleasure of teasing him, by asking him all sorts of puzzling and disagreeable questions about Mrs. Leary."

With this amiable intention her ladyship, who did not in general favour Colonel Mordaunt with much of her notice, endeavoured in the course of the evening to draw him into conversation. As Charles particularly disliked

her, she did not find this very easy; yet she persevered in her attempts until she accomplished her purpose.

When they had talked upon indifferent subjects for some time, she suddenly observed, fixing her eyes intently upon him as she spoke,—

"There has been a very *remarkable* person staying lately in the village of Mordaunt, has there not?"

Charles looked surprised at her question, yet he replied very coolly,—

"If there has, I am ignorant of the circumstance."

"You surely must have heard of Susan Leary? My maid, who is a relation of hers, has told me such strange things about her, that I felt quite a curiosity to see her."

"Since Mrs. Leary is so singular a character, my sister has been very remiss in never having described her to me, for I suppose *she* must be acquainted with her. Until this instant, her very name was unknown to me."

"That is odd!" continued Lady Caroline unconsciously, "Augusta certainly knows a good deal about her,—I was going to say she was a friend of hers, but that I believe is not exactly the case, and probably they will never meet again."

"Then I am afraid that *I* have very little chance of being introduced to her. Has she left Mordaunt? or is she likely to leave the world before Augusta returns there?"

"Your affected ignorance of everything relating to Susan Leary is really admirable!" said Lady Caroline; "and your answers to my inquiries have been framed with a very ingenious degree of diplomatic caution: but I am too cunning and too well-informed to be deceived by them. You may throw dust into my eyes, but you will find that you cannot succeed in blinding me."

"Upon my word, Lady Caroline, this is all so incomprehensible to me," rejoined Charles gravely, "that I am unable to attempt even to defend myself against your attack; and as I feel very unwilling to quarrel with you, I think the sooner we put an end to our conversation the better."

"I dare say you do!" replied her ladyship in a most provoking tone. "But it is not necessary to look so amazingly savage, or to mount your high horse, for I had no desire to offend you to all *outrance*. I admit that it cannot be pleasant to you to find that your family secrets are suspected; but you may make yourself perfectly easy, as it is not, I

assure you, my purpose to betray them: and to show you how pacifically I am inclined, I will not again contradict you when you tell me that you know nothing whatever of Susan Barry;—should you even think proper to assert that you never heard of such people as your father's gardener Mr. Barker, and his wife, I will even go so far as to affect to believe you."

"It is not very probable," remarked Colonel Mordaunt indignantly, "that *I* should make any assertion in case so absurd and so contrary to truth. I see that *you* are determined to provoke me, and I warn you that *I* am determined you shall not succeed."

He rose to leave her as he concluded these words.

"Stay!" exclaimed Lady Caroline, assuming a more playful manner. "*I* should state the case otherwise. *I* should say that you were resolved to put me to silence, and that *I* am resolved to continue to talk to you. Your wishing to run away from me convicts you of a sad want of gallantry; but, under your circumstances," (she looked towards Lady Agnes,) "I am conscious that I ought to excuse you."

Charles could not do less than sit down again.

"Since you do not fancy the subject of Susan Leary," pursued her ladyship, "we will speak of something else: I will describe to you a curious dream of mine which has haunted me all day.—I thought I was at Estonville, and that a stranger, whom I had never beheld in my life, presented himself suddenly before me. I asked him who he was, and whence he came; and he answered in a silvery sort of voice, that his name was Richard O'Donnel, and that he had risen out of one of the rivers in Ireland."

At the name of O'Donnel, Colonel Mordaunt started.

"Perhaps," he said, "your mysterious visitor was a cousin of mine? May I inquire what was the purport of his intrusion at Estonville?"

"He did not very clearly explain it to me," replied Lady Caroline, looking at her companion with so curiously eager a glance that she seemed desirous to read what was passing in his inmost mind. "He told me, 'that his appearance would occasion astonishment, perplexity, and distress to some of those with whom I was nearly connected;—that it would be a marvel which for a short space of time would surprise and interest all the world;—but that his very existence was a dark riddle which would remain enveloped in mystery until the appointed mo-



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imagined to have been perfectly intelligible to him.

She had, in truth, disquieted him extremely. He could not tell exactly what to apprehend, but he perceived that there was some serious mischief brewing up against him; and he knew that if Lady Caroline had not originally devised it, she would be ready enough to aid and promote it.

"Caroline has been vexing you," said Lady Agnes, as he seated himself in silence beside her. "I do not ask you what she has been saying, but I advise you not to let it give you any farther concern. It really is not worth while to care about the disagreeable things she utters for no other purpose than to plague her friends and make them feel uncomfortable."

Charles thanked Lady Agnes for her kind counsel, and promised to follow it; but although he was conscious of the justice of her observation as applied generally, he fancied this particular instance formed an exception to it: he was convinced that Lady Caroline's mysterious allusions had not been made at random; and while he affected to appear as gay as usual, he found it impossible to banish them from his thoughts. It was rather late when he returned home; Augusta had retired, and his

mother was alone in the drawing-room. She asked her son several questions about his dinner-party; and then remarked with a smile, "that she hoped Lady Agnes had not been unkind to him, for he looked unusually grave and moody."

"Agnes never is unkind!" replied Charles indignantly; and an instant afterwards he added,—"I beg your pardon, my dear mother, for having spoken so hastily. I confess I am out of humour to-night: I have been foolish enough to allow myself to be annoyed by Lady Caroline."

"Lady Caroline grows so insufferable," observed Mrs. Mordaunt, "that it is a perfect *supplice* to be in her society. If poor Agnes did not possess the temper of an angel, I am sure she would not be able to live in the same house with her."

This just yet delicate and well-timed compliment to his love brought a smile of pleasure across Charles's countenance.

"She would not indeed!" he exclaimed; "and I never felt more strongly alive to the truth of that remark than I do at the present moment."

A pause ensued, which was at length broken by Colonel Mordaunt.

"My amiable future sister-in-law," he said, "has been talking to me this evening of a certain Mrs. Leary, who is reckoned, it seems, a very extraordinary and interesting character by her ladyship and her maid."

"How can Lady Caroline Mortimer know anything about Susan Leary?" cried Mrs. Mordaunt with some surprise. Then recollecting herself, she continued, "Oh yes! to be sure she may: I had forgotten that one of the Barkers has lived with her for several years; —this girl has probably related her cousin's history to her mistress."

"But who and what is Susan Leary?" inquired Charles, whose curiosity was now becoming powerfully excited. "Do, pray, be good enough to enlighten my mind, and to describe to me her character, station, and adventures."

"I am afraid," rejoined his mother, who was rather amused at the eagerness of his manner, "you have raised your expectations so highly, that you will be a little disappointed when I tell you Mrs. Leary is nobody more or less than Barker the gardener's sister. She was formerly nurse to Mrs. O'Donnel's children; and she is so attached to the memory of her late mistress, that she looks upon your father and upon all

of you as a race of usurpers, who have no right to enjoy the property that once belonged to *her* and to her sons. After Mrs. O'Donnel's death, Susan married and settled in Ireland; and there she remained until she came over to pay a visit to her relations, just before Augusta and I left the country."

Charles listened to this account with very marked attention, and then asked if the good woman was still in the village of Mordaunt.

"I dare say that she is. Her husband and all her Irish friends are dead, and she probably intends to spend the rest of her days on this side of the water. I regret being obliged to destroy the romance with which Lady Caroline has surrounded Mrs. Leary, by adding, that I hear she is an uncommonly stern, ungracious-mannered person, and very frightful to look upon. Your sister saw her at Barker's cottage, and, between ourselves, was literally terrified by her wild expressions and uncouth appearance: she could think and talk of nothing else the whole of the evening afterwards. I wonder Augusta has never given you a description of her. Perhaps, since her mind has been occupied by more interesting concerns, she has forgotten her singular Irish acquaintance,

who certainly made a deep impression upon her fancy for some time."

After the picture his mother had thus drawn of his imagined heroine, Colonel Mordaunt seemed quite satisfied that she was unworthy to occupy his farther consideration: he spoke of other subjects, and continued conversing with Mrs. Mordaunt until his father's knock was heard.

Charles was then very glad to escape to his own room: he longed to arrange his perplexed and uncomfortable thoughts; and he was anxious to lose no time in devising what measures he might judge it most advisable to take, to crush the malicious combination that appeared to be forming against the peace and prosperity of his family.

He had dissembled his uneasiness, and concealed his suspicions from his mother; but the instant she told him that Susan Leary had been an old and devoted servant of Mrs. O'Donnel's, it struck him forcibly that this singular woman must have been connected with Lady Caroline Mortimer's real or pretended dream. He reflected again and again upon this idea, and at last he arrived at a conclusion that it was her ladyship's intention, through Susan's agency,

and with her assistance, to circulate a report that Mr. Richard O'Donnel had been rescued from a watery grave: he even thought it not improbable that some impostor might be brought forward to personate his Irish cousin, in order to give a more plausible appearance to the story, and to occasion additional trouble to Mr. Mordaunt. But it never entered into Charles's brain to imagine the possibility of the existence of the real heir of Mordaunt. The extent of the danger and inconvenience he apprehended, was his father's being obliged to incur a certain degree of expense, and to suffer no inconsiderable share of anxiety, worry, and vexation of spirit.

He fancied that his best chance of discovering and defeating Lady Caroline's plans, (if hers they were,) would be to get hold of her supposed accomplice, Susan Leary; and, to effect this purpose, he determined to go down immediately to Mordaunt. He might easily find a pretence for such a journey, as the preparations for his reception at his future abode in that neighbourhood were already in progress, and it was his intention to set out the following evening.

Since Colonel Mordaunt's arrival in town, he had not seen a great deal of his sister: he

spent, of course, a large portion of his time at Lord Estonville's; but when he happened to be at home, Augusta perceived with pain and regret the sadly altered estimation in which he now held her. There was nothing decidedly cold in his manner towards her, yet he seemed to feel a sort of restraint in her presence, and to be glad to find any excuse for escaping from her society. He was scrupulously civil in his behaviour to Mr. Stafford, but it was evident that he could not bear the sight of him; and after he had once congratulated Augusta rather awkwardly upon her approaching marriage, he never recurred to the subject again.

Miss Mordaunt had not long established herself in her little boudoir on the morning after the discussions that have been already related, when her brother came to announce to her his intended departure. His appearance in that room was both so unusual and so unexpected, that she felt extreme surprise as well as pleasure at seeing him; and she exclaimed almost involuntarily,——

"How kind it is of you, my dear Charles, to come and visit me! It puts me very agreeably in mind of old times. We have met so seldom lately, except in public, that it is quite a treat to me to receive you sociably *chez moi*."

Charles was much touched by this reception: he looked at his sister very affectionately for a minute or two; then sighed deeply, and replied,——

"The errand that brought me here even now, was to tell you that we are going to part: I find that I shall be obliged to be at Mordaunt to-morrow."

"At Mordaunt!" exclaimed Augusta with astonishment. "Do you leave London then this morning?"

"No; I shall stay here till the evening, and travel down by the mail. Can I do anything for you—execute any commission, when I arrive at the end of my journey?"

"Thank you, I cannot recollect any to entrust to you. How long do you expect to be absent?"

"I hope I shall not be detained above a day or two. Have you no message to send to your friend Mrs. Barker? I shall probably visit her: my mother gave me last night such a charming description of the engaging qualities of her guest and relation Mrs. Leary, that I naturally feel a great desire to see so strangely prepossessing a person."

Augusta grew extremely red. "You will be disappointed," she replied quickly, "if you

expect to find Susan Leary at her brother's: she has left Mordaunt."

"Are you sure of that?" inquired Charles, fixing his eyes upon his sister as he spoke in a manner which greatly increased her confusion.

Now Augusta was not quite sure of the fact she had asserted. Mr. Stafford had told her he intended to remove the old woman immediately, but he had never informed her that his purpose had been actually carried into execution; she was therefore afraid to express herself decidedly upon the subject, or to admit that she was very correctly acquainted with Susan's proceedings, lest by so doing she might betray those secrets she was most anxious to conceal.

She answered her brother's interrogation with considerable embarrassment and hesitation.

"I really am not certain about it;—I think I heard that she was to leave her relations before this time:—but it is a matter of little consequence. At any rate," she added more earnestly, "let me entreat you, Charles, not to call upon this Mrs. Leary; it will be much better that you should not see her."

"Why should not I see her?" said Colonel Mortimer with a look of astonishment.

"Because her behaviour is so singularly unpractised, and she says such disagreeable, such cuttingly provoking things, that I am convinced you would detest her. I suspect that, before you had been in her society five minutes, you would completely lose all patience with her, and then perhaps——"

"Oh, if that is all you are afraid of," exclaimed Charles, interrupting his sister, "you may perfectly trust me. I should be too well prepared for the uncourteous reception I should probably meet with from this revolting old hag, to allow myself to be vexed by her malice. I should look at her as at a tigress or any other ill-disposed object of natural curiosity, and of course without having the slightest intention of fighting with the creature in its den. If Mrs. Leary should be pleased to brand my father and everybody belonging to him with the flattering epithet of interlopers, I should sit and listen to her as quietly as a lamb;—if she should threaten to call up the spirits of all the O'Donnels from their graves, I should not feel the remotest apprehension that any one of them would ever really rise at her bidding——"

He stopped short, for he perceived that the

colour had suddenly fled from Augusta's face; even her lips had become white as marble; and, scarcely able to support herself, she had sunk back nearly fainting upon the sofa.

"What is the matter with you, my dearest Augusta?" he ejaculated in a tone of great dismay.

"Nothing,—really nothing," she replied almost inarticulately. "I have had a bad headache, and——" here her voice entirely failed her.

Charles sat down beside her, and taking her hand very tenderly—"And you have some secret distress," he said, "that has been weighing heavily upon your spirits, and has just now overcome you. Will you not confide your sorrows to me? I may not indeed be able to relieve them, but I will at least promise to share them."

"Oh no, no!" exclaimed Augusta, rousing herself at once from her languor by a violent exertion,—"you are quite mistaken; I have no secret distress to reveal to you; I am not unhappy."

Charles relinquished her hand with a sigh of disappointment, and drew himself up with his former stiffness of manner.

"May Heaven bless you, my dearest bro-

ther," continued Augusta in a melancholy accent, "for the affectionate kindness of your intention! I see you are offended with me, and I can only implore you to forgive me. You little know how it breaks my heart to think that you believe me ungracious or unworthy of the attachment you once entertained for me!"

Charles had scarcely had time to soothe her agonised feelings, by assuring her of the warmth of his affection for her, when a servant came to inform them that Mr. Stafford was in the drawing-room.

"Mr. Stafford!" cried Augusta wildly, as soon as the man was gone,—"I cannot receive him at present, my head aches too much! I shall perhaps be better in the evening." And she pressed both her hands upon her brow as she spoke, as if she was suffering great pain.

"Shall I go and explain this to Stafford?" asked Colonel Mordaunt very gently. "Shall I tell him that you are not well enough to see him this morning?"

"Yes, do."

But before Charles had reached the door, she sprang forward to stop him; a new impulse seemed to have actuated her, and she exclaimed——

"I am afraid you will consider me very variable: I have changed my mind, and I now feel that I should like to see Mr. Stafford. I have just recollected something that I particularly wish to say to him."

"You are not in a state to talk to anybody at this moment," observed Charles, attempting to lead her back to the sofa. "You must stay here for about a quarter of an hour to compose your spirits, before you join us in the drawing-room. In the mean while, it shall be my task to endeavour to entertain your visitor to the best of my ability."

"This is too much!" replied Augusta. "I can never express to you how grateful I am for the consideration and kindness you have shown for me."

She was evidently affected; her brother hurried away from her; and as soon as he had closed the door, she gave unrestrained relief to her feelings in a violent flood of tears.

Augusta's reason for seeking an immediate conference with her cousin proceeded from a hope of ascertaining if Susan Leary had left Mordaunt; and in this she was not disappointed. He told her he had just received a letter from Raymond, in which that trusty agent related to him, "that he had at first found Susan

rather refractory,—indeed, that he was inclined to imagine her intellect had become slightly deranged; but that he had succeeded in bringing her to listen to reason, and that she had consented cheerfully to accompany him not to Ireland, as the Barkers imagined, but to Bloomsbury." From that place his letter was dated; and he added, "that he had safely domiciliated his charge in a family by whom she would be comfortably and carefully attended to; and who having been warned that she was at times subject to affections of the brain, would take little notice of her wanderings."

It was a great satisfaction to Augusta to know that all danger of an interview between her brother and Susan was at an end: she recalled to Mr. Stafford every word that Charles had said about that remarkable personage; and, although he was rather surprised at hearing what had passed, she found he did not attach the same importance to it that she did.

"When Charles learns," he observed calmly, "that old Susan has quitted the neighbourhood of Mordaunt, he will most likely never think of her again."

"But those hints about a claimant of the name of O'Donnel—I cannot help feeling disquieted about them. How could such ideas

have entered his imagination? *They* were not, I am sure, suggested to him by mamma."

"It very little signifies how or where he picked them up," replied Mr. Stafford: "Mrs. Barker has in all probability blabbed to some friend, who has told the story again to some other friend; and so it has gone from mouth to mouth, until it has reached your brother's ears."

"No," exclaimed Augusta indignantly, "you do her wrong: I am certain that Mary Barker has *not* betrayed our secret to anybody."

"Well, I beg her pardon; Susan may have had other acquaintance who have proved more indiscreet. But let me persuade you, Augusta, that it really is not worth our while to alarm ourselves about rumours which will very soon die away and be forgotten, unless *we* become the instruments of bringing them into notice."

Augusta tried to assent to these arguments, yet they did not carry conviction to her mind; and she continued all day in a state of nervous and feverish excitement. The repeated alarms which had lately followed one another in quick succession, were beginning to impress her with a settled apprehension that the discovery of Richard O'Donnel's existence could not be much le and the probable con-



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Let me request you as a favour not to tell her
that Mordaunt is my destination."

Lady Agnes was amused at this mode of
revenge, and promised to keep his secret faith-
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sequences of such a disclosure she did not dare to allow herself even to imagine.

Charles Mordaunt's interest had been excited in no ordinary degree during his last conference with his sister. His feelings, too, had been deeply touched by the warm affection she had evinced for him; he had seen her suffering from bodily or mental pain, perhaps both; and, as he reflected upon all these circumstances, he quite forgot her failings, and his former tenderness for her returned as strongly as ever.

As he had always doubted her really liking Mr. Stafford, he had imagined she was going to confide to him that she could not bring herself to feel happy at the prospect of her marriage; and he now fancied that a sense of false shame alone had restrained her from doing so. "Perhaps," thought he, "it is much better she did not open her mind to me upon a subject that would have been very distressing to us both; for, after things have proceeded so far, any interference upon my part would have been out of the question, and she might afterwards have regretted having told me what it is far wiser for her to conceal from every one."

His sister's idea that Mrs. Leary had either already left Barker's, or was upon the point of taking her departure, convinced him that he

ought not to delay his journey. It seemed strange that Augusta should feel apprehensive of his seeing this singular woman; and he was much struck by the sort of fascination she appeared to have exercised over her mind.

Charles had few arrangements to make: he sent his servant to secure him a place in the mail, and then proceeded to bid adieu to Lady Agnes, and to explain to her where he was going.

She was by no means surprised at his departure.

"Your sister teased me last night," observed he with a smile; "so, to punish her for this offence, I will not gratify her curiosity to-day. Let me request you as a favour not to tell her that Mordaunt is my destination."

Lady Agnes was amused at this mode of revenge, and promised to keep his secret faithfully.

CHAPTER VIII.

Talbot.—I often came where I did hear of her, but cannot find her.

SHAKSPEARE.

No faith to such delusions give;
His mortal term is past.—
Not so! not so! he is alive,
And will be found at last.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

COLONEL MORDAUNT'S unexpected arrival caused a sensation in the house at Mordaunt. As soon as he had ordered some breakfast, he strolled out into the park, as if he wished to refresh himself with a little country air after his dusty journey. He had not proceeded far, however, when he struck off in the direction of the garden, and quickening his pace, a short cut brought him speedily to Barker's cottage.

The gardener himself was not at home, but his wife was working in the porch before the door. She started at seeing Charles, and in-

quired in an agitated voice after Miss Mordaunt and all the family.

Her young master accepted the invitation she afterwards gave him to walk into her house and rest himself.

"As I find you alone," he observed, "I suppose that your sister-in-law has left you?"

"Yes," replied Mary Barker," she went away about a week ago; and I believe we may thank your father, sir, for having got rid of her. The moment I saw you, I guessed you were come to speak to me about Susan."

Charles was much astonished; he assured Mrs. Barker that, far from having been instrumental in facilitating the departure of her guest, he was convinced his father was not even aware of the circumstances,—indeed, that he much doubted if he had ever heard of her being at Mordaunt.

Mrs. Barker looked extremely perplexed.

"Miss Mordaunt has not mentioned my letter to you then," she said; "and, as that is the case, perhaps I am not doing right in naming to you the liberty I ventured to take."

Yet Charles pressed her so earnestly to explain what she meant, that she at length told him of her having written to his sister, described

everything she had related in her letter, and also showed him the answer she had received from Augusta.

Charles remarked, "that his father had had much business upon his hands lately; and that, as he had himself been often in and out of town, it was not extraordinary he had forgotten to speak of this history to him." He added with affected carelessness, "that *he* saw the thing just in the same light that Mr. Mordaunt did."

These were very far from being his real sentiments; yet he did not wish to let his companion discover how excessively the whole affair of the letter puzzled and annoyed him. He strongly suspected that Augusta had concealed her communication from their father; yet, if so, in what manner could he account for the arrival of the promised emissary who had carried off Susan Leary?

He contrived to extract from Mary Barker, "that the old gentleman," as she styled him, "who had come to fetch her sister-in-law, seemed to be very well known to her;—that she had expressed great pleasure at seeing him, and had inquired eagerly about his dear young master;—that she thought she had heard Susan call him

Mr. Raymond when he first entered the house; but that she never mentioned his name afterwards, and even refused to tell her what it was: —that they talked a great deal together, and appeared at one time to be coming to high words; (she was not then in the same room with them;) yet that they ended by agreeing so well, that they started together for Ireland the very next morning."

Charles had not succeeded in deceiving Mary Barker; she saw he was much worried, and she secretly and sincerely pitied him. As he retraced his way from her cottage, he tried in vain to recollect ever having heard of any dependant or acquaintance of his father's of the name of Raymond; and he began to wonder if it was possible he could be a creature of Lady Caroline Mortimer's.

He was now more desirous to see Susan Leary than ever: he had learned the name of the village as well as of the county in which she had formerly lived, and he resolved to follow her to Ireland.

It is needless to say, that his search for her there proved as fruitless as it had done at Mordaunt. Her neighbours could give no account of her; they declared she had gone away after

everything she had taken and since; yet he also showed him the information from them from Augusta proceedings.

Charles remarked that two strangers, an old man of business and a young one, had spent a fortnight he had been last autumn at a market-town it was not [illegible]—that nobody knew who they spoke of if they came for;—that it was supposed the old man was a kind of servant to the [illegible] and that they had both visited Susan Hill at least, if not oftener;—that she was [illegible] mysterious when she was asked any questions about them; but that, since her interview with these strangers, she had become quite a different person."

Susan Henry, it was reported to him, was not thought to be always right in her head; she had been frequently suspected of being a witch; and about the time that the two gentlemen were over, strange rumours had been circulated about old Mr. O'Donnel. It was said that his spirit walked; and some of the old labourers who best recollected him solemnly affirmed that they had actually seen him prowling round the precincts of his ruinous house and dilapidated demains, but that he had vanished as soon as he perceived that he was observed.

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dined with them, he determined to
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different gossip; and then changing his
elling dress, he walked to Lord Estonville's,
he was anxious to account to Lady Agnes
for his rather protracted absence.

He found her sitting with her mother and an old friend of Lady Estonville's who often spent her evenings with her. The earl was gone down to the House of Lords, and Lady Caroline had accompanied Lady Mary Carrington to a party; so that Charles had an opportunity of talking to his love without being overheard or interrupted.

He revealed to her the whole story of his journey, and of everything connected with it; and was much pleased when she told him she approved and admired the course he had taken. She thanked him for confiding to her his secret, which, she assured him, had relieved her mind of a great weight; as her sister Caroline had thrown out such alarming hints to her while

he was away, that she had apprehended a much more dreadful disclosure. She said, "that a dark plot was evidently in agitation; but that she trusted it would share the fate of most other plots, and be entirely defeated." In short, her arguments were at once so sensible and so encouraging, that they inspired him with hope and confidence; and he left her very much comforted.

As Charles was going up to his bed-room, he happened to meet his father upon the staircase, and he felt tempted to ask him in a careless way if he chanced to know a Mr. Raymond.

"Raymond?" repeated Mr. Mordaunt; "I have seen such a man certainly, but I cannot boast of much acquaintance with him. You should have addressed yourself to Stafford, if you wish to obtain any information about Mr. Raymond: at least, he has an old servant of that name, who has lived with him, I believe, from the hour of his birth."

Charles started at this intelligence, for it conveyed to him a new and most extraordinary light! He turned again to Mr. Mordaunt, and inquired if he recollected the former Mr. Stafford.

"To be sure I do," was his reply,—"and a very disagreeable, ill-conditioned fellow I al-

ways thought him. We never got farther than an interchange of bows, and I little suspected that any future alliance would unite his family and mine."

"Is Stafford like his father in appearance?"

"Not the slightest degree in the world; indeed, it is impossible to imagine two people more perfectly different. If you want to know whom your future brother-in-law *is* like, I will tell you his resemblance in one word;—he is the very image of that worthless dog O'Donnel, who married my cousin. Though I have never mentioned the resemblance to you before, I have observed it to your mother, who sees it almost as strongly as I do."

This last remark came like a thunderbolt upon poor Charles, and overwhelmed him with an undefined conviction of the truth. He concealed his emotion however from his father, wished him good night, and went to bed, but not to rest.

The astonishment he felt at the discovery he had just made, could only be equalled by his dismay. How Mr. Stafford and Richard O'Donnel could possibly be identified in one and the same person, was a mystery that still appeared to him perfectly incomprehensible. Yet, that such was the fact, he entertained little

doubt; and, if it really proved so, the perspective of the distress that awaited his own family struck him as most appalling! Phantoms of misery rose up in a thousand shapes to torment him: he anticipated the privations his father and mother would endure if they found themselves again reduced to poverty; and he was aware how keenly they would both feel such a reverse of fortune. He foresaw the destruction of all his own bright prospects and future happiness;—he recollected that Edward's hopes would also be entirely blighted. Then his sister—he scarcely knew what to think of Augusta. Could she have consented to become the wife of the person who, she was aware, was about to deprive her father of all his possessions?—*Or* could she have acted a nobler part, and agreed to marry Mr. Stafford, to avert, or at least to mitigate, the misfortunes of her family? Charles was not inclined to believe that either of these suppositions was very probable. It was evident that his sister had been more or less admitted into her lover's confidence; but he did not imagine that he had trusted her with his deepest and most important secrets. He now understood why she had betrayed alarm when he mentioned his intention of visiting Susan Leary: he was persuaded

she had shown Mary Barker's letter to Mr. Stafford, and that the latter had prevailed upon her to conceal it from her father, under pretence of sparing him unnecessary disquietude; and that, in order to set Augusta's mind at ease, and likewise to prevent any premature disclosure, Raymond had been despatched into the country to remove Susan from Mordaunt.

"It must be so," he thought; "he has made my sister his dupe and his victim,— I can never imagine she can be his accomplice."

Colonel Mordaunt saw the imperious necessity of communicating his suspicions to his father without delay; but his greatest difficulty was to devise in what manner he could render the shock least distressing to him. He asked himself, too, how he could ever have fortitude to reveal to Lady Agnes the dreadful discovery that had flashed upon him, and to announce to her that he must consequently relinquish the hope in which all his earthly happiness was centred? He was conscious that she was too sincerely attached to him not to share the anguish this separation would bring upon him; and the idea that *he* should thus become the occasion of rendering *her* unhappy, drove him almost distracted.

When Charles made his appearance at break-

fast, his mother remarked to him, "that he seemed to be still tired with his journey;" and he fancied that Augusta watched him from time to time with a sort of painful anxiety. He confessed he had not quite recovered the effects of his fatigue, for he could not even pretend to be in spirits; and as soon as the ladies went up-stairs, he related to his father, as delicately yet as clearly as possible, the nature of the hints that had alarmed him, of the evidence he had obtained during his absence from town, and of his own conjectures upon the subject since his return.

Mr. Mordaunt listened to him at first with great curiosity and attention, and afterwards with visible uneasiness and dismay.

"This is a most extraordinary story altogether," he said, "and requires the strictest and most immediate investigation: but *I* am willing to think—to hope, that the danger which hangs over us is not quite so awfully serious as *you* apprehend it to be. I cannot bring myself to believe anything so incredible as that I should find one of my cousin's sons actually alive in the person of Mr. Stafford: I must admit the possibility of a transmigration of souls before I can arrive at such a persuasion. There has either arisen some great

accidental mistake, or a wilful and diabolical fraud is now in preparation against us. It was very unfortunate you could not find this mischievous old mad woman, Susan Leary, who appears to have been at the bottom of the whole concern. But, since she has been taken out of the way, and we have no means of discovering what is become of her, the only course we can pursue is to apply at once to Stafford, who has at least been instrumental in causing her disappearance. As my future son-in-law, it will be showing him a natural mark of confidence to communicate to him the unpleasant rumours that have reached me respecting Mr. O'Donnel. I shall do this in a manner which need not lead him to suppose I suspect him of having any personal connexion with these rumours; and the mode in which he receives my intelligence will enable me to judge if I am henceforward to consider him my friend or my enemy."

Charles was much relieved by the way in which Mr. Mordaunt bore the announcement he had dreaded to make to him: he had a high opinion of his father's judgment and acuteness, and he felt his own fears considerably shaken by the arguments he had brought forward to weaken or remove them.

When the father and son sallied forth together to call upon Mr. Stafford, it was still so early that they thought themselves pretty sure of finding him at home; and they were not disappointed. He received them most graciously, but it struck them both that he looked a little agitated and disconcerted at their first entrance.

Mr. Mordaunt lost no time in explaining the object of their visit; and while he was speaking, he observed that Mr. Stafford's countenance changed repeatedly, and betrayed extreme distress and confusion. For some moments afterwards he appeared abashed and irresolute; but at length raising his head as if he had formed some sudden determination, he exclaimed,—

"I feel much gratified by the candour of your communication; but it has come rather unexpectedly upon me, and the shock has embarrassed me considerably. You will, I am sure, make allowance for the awkwardness of my situation. I now find myself bound in honour to relieve your uneasiness, however painful the effort may prove to myself."

He paused: his two auditors looked at him with eager curiosity, and he thus resumed his [illegible]—

"Mr. Mordaunt, I know that you have remarked my personal resemblance to Mr. O'Donnel, for I recollect that you formerly asked me if I was any relation of his. I then told you, and as I thought truly, that I was not; but last autumn a very extraordinary and unpleasant discovery was made to me upon that subject. You are aware that the late Mr. Stafford, my reputed father, was an Irishman; and you probably may have heard that the estate in Ireland where he spent much of his time adjoined your relation's property. It would ill become *me* to say that Mr. O'Donnel was reckoned a very handsome man, nor is it necessary I should inform you that he was celebrated for his gallantries. As a very near neighbour of Mr. Stafford's, he was of course frequently invited to his house; and during these visits he unfortunately contrived to make himself too agreeable to my mother, who, like many Indian ladies, was not, I fear, very correct in her conduct, or very strict in her morals. It is most distressing, most humiliating to me, to be obliged to disclose the frailties of my parent,—to find myself, in short, under the necessity of confessing that I have every reason to believe I am Mr. O'Donnel's son."

Mr. Mordaunt gave a violent start of asto-

nishment, and an involuntary exclamation of surprise and satisfaction burst from the lips of Charles.

"Mr. Stafford," continued their companion, "did not discover his wife's infidelity until some months after my birth. He concealed it from the world, because it would not have suited either his convenience or his inclination to give up her fortune by divorcing her; but towards me, whom he could scarcely look upon as his own child, he always felt a secret and rooted aversion, in spite of the outward affection he professed for me. There are few people now alive who have any recollection of the scandalous rumours concerning my mother and Mr. O'Donnel, that were once whispered pretty freely within the limited circle of their immediate neighbourhood. One of these persons is my old servant Raymond, who was a particular favourite of Mr. Stafford's, and was well acquainted with all his master's secrets. It was from him that, in a moment of unguarded excitement, I accidentally learnt the supposed history of my birth; and as I was extremely unwilling to credit an idea so mortifying to my feelings and so disgraceful to my mother's character, Raymond begged I would accompany him to Ireland, where, he said, he had no

doubt he could bring forward more than one evidence to prove to me that the scandal he had hinted, had been no invention of his own. After a severe struggle with myself, I adopted the plan he suggested; and, during the period we passed in my native country, he at least succeeded in convincing me of the levity of my mother's behaviour. He proposed that, amongst other old friends of his, we should make a visit to Susan Leary, who, from having been nurse to Mrs. O'Donnel's children, was likely to remember all the circumstances that had preceded her late master's quarrel with Mr. Stafford. We were told that Susan was not always quite in her sane mind; but I did not then know how completely her intellect had become warped, or I should never have intruded myself upon her notice. The moment she beheld me, she was so much struck by my likeness to my father, that she took it into her head I must be her dear child Richard O'Donnel come to life again. Nothing could persuade her this fancy was erroneous; she insisted upon it that she was right, and reproached me with my unnatural cruelty in desiring to deceive her. As I found it vain to reason with a lunatic, I thought the best way of silencing her was to pretend to give way to her imaginations. I

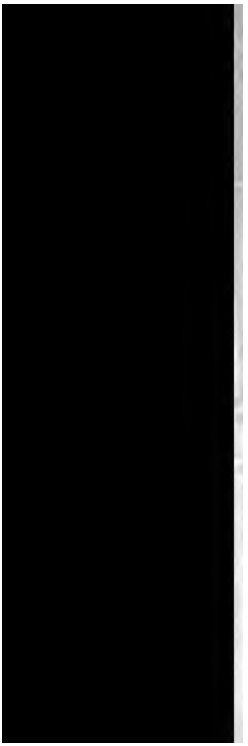
told her she must never disclose to anybody who I was: and, before I left Ireland, I took care to place her in more comfortable pecuniary circumstances. I should not have alluded to this, had I not wished to inform you that by so doing I probably afforded her the means of coming over to see her relations at Mordaunt. As soon as I heard of her being there, and of her having hinted her visionary fancies to her sister-in-law, I despatched Raymond to carry her back to Ireland. She would not hear of returning to that country; but as he declared to her that Mr. Richard O'Donnel insisted upon her leaving Mordaunt, she agreed to go with him to Blossomhide, where she is now safely established. I need not, I am sure, request you to reveal to no persons but the members of your own family the painful confession I have just made to you; and should any reports concerning Mr. O'Donnel ever be mentioned in your presence, I trust that you will do me the kindness to repress and contradict them. To one living being only have I hitherto confided who I really am;—I imparted the secret of my birth to Augusta before she last consented to make up to me for all my past mortifications by uniting her destiny with mine. I now feel that I ought to have acquainted you

with it also, when I solicited you to accept me as your son-in-law. I regret sincerely that I did not do so; but I hope that this apparent disingenuity upon my part has not deprived me of your esteem and good opinion."

"By no means," said Mr. Mordaunt, holding out his hand to Mr. Stafford. "I will not indeed deny that I might have been better pleased had you given me such a mark of your confidence; and it would have saved Charles the trouble of a journey to Mordaunt, a wild-goose chase to Ireland, and about twelve hours of dreadful disquietude."

Indeed Mr. Stafford's explanation had appeared perfectly satisfactory to both the Mordaunts. His confession seemed to have been drawn from him so naturally, and expressed so candidly, that they never suspected he could still be deceiving them; and since he had entirely removed all their apprehensions about the apparition of a claimant to the Mordaunt estate, they were willing to overlook the secret stain in his birth, which at any other moment they might have considered a more serious stumbling-block.

As Mr. Mordaunt happened to have an appointment, he did not return straight home; and Charles could not resist the temptation of



Augusta grew very pale, but begged that her mother would not scruple, out of tenderness for her feelings, to communicate to her the full extent of the danger that was to be apprehended.

Mrs. Mordaunt then told her, "that in consequence of several explicit intimations which had been given her by Lady Caroline Mortimer, coupled with other circumstances which had lately come under her own observation, she had too much reason to fear that Mr. Mordaunt was likely to be very soon disturbed in the possession of Mordaunt. Should this unfortunately prove to be the case," concluded she, "I shall rejoice more than ever that *you* at least, my dear child, will have previously secured a comfortable and advantageous establishment for yourself."

Augusta sighed. "Lady Caroline," she said, "has also been obliging enough to favour me with some of her agreeable hints. It is very unpleasant to hear them, which is probably the principal inducement she finds for repeating them; but I really hope that neither she nor any one else will ever seriously dispute papa's claim to his estate."

"That it will be disputed," pursued Mrs. Mordaunt, "I have little doubt; but with what success, the title the claimant can bring

forward must alone determine. I am persuaded that the horrible old woman, Susan Leary, has been one of the instigators of the mischief; and I strongly suspect that your brother left town for no other purpose than to obtain an interview with *her*. If we may judge from appearances, it must have proved a very unsatisfactory one; for I never beheld such an object of wretchedness and despair as poor Charles looks this morning."

"He certainly does," replied Augusta. "I should very much like to know where he has been, and what he has been about."

"We shall soon learn," I imagine, continued Mrs. Mordaunt in a melancholy tone. "For myself, I care very little: experience has rendered me fully conscious of the discomforts of poverty, yet I could be well contented to submit to them if they were to affect *me* alone. It is the anticipation of the reverse of fortune which awaits Mr. Mordaunt and my sons that afflicts me,—it is the idea of the mortifications they will suffer that breaks my heart! I have neither courage nor fortitude to be able to bear that prospect!" And as she concluded these words, Mrs. Mordaunt burst into tears.

Augusta had never seen her mother weep

before, for she was not a person who was often overpowered by her feelings, and the spectacle affected her deeply. She took her hand very affectionately,—

"And do you seriously believe, mamma," she asked, "that the chance of retaining Mordaunt is so very desperate?"

"I scarcely know what to think," answered Mrs. Mordaunt, hastily brushing away her tears,—"I am afraid that it is; but the whole business is involved in mystery. I have not yet had the heart to speak about it to your father."

"Then, my dearest mamma," said Augusta in a firm voice, "let me entreat you to be comforted, and to rely upon my assurance that no person will ever actually make his appearance for the purpose of attempting to dispossess papa or my brothers of their inheritance."

Mrs. Mordaunt was much struck by her daughter's tone and manner; and she fixed her eyes upon her with eager curiosity, as she exclaimed,

"How is it possible for *you* to give me this assurance, Augusta?"

Miss Mordaunt became considerably embarrassed. "I beseech you," she replied, "to spare me those questions which it grieves me

to be unable to answer; and I beg you to have the kindness to trust in an assertion which I would not have made to you for all the world if I had not had good grounds to feel convinced of its truth. I happen to know much more about this dark affair than you are aware of; but I am not at liberty to explain it to you."

A vague suspicion of this had occasionally shot across Mrs. Mordaunt's imagination.

"I will trust you most implicitly, my dear girl," she observed, "and I will also forbear to distress you by my curiosity. But, oh, Augusta! if it is indeed in *your* power to avert the storm which threatens to overwhelm your family,—if you can, without risking your own happiness, save your father and your brothers from ruin,—I conjure—I implore you to endeavour to do it!"

Augusta literally gasped for breath. "I have done it!" she said. Then striving to suppress her emotion, she added with more firmness, "I feel very grateful to you, mamma, for the injunction you have just given me; since it confirms me in my own previous conviction that I have done right—that I have acted as you would have directed me."

"My admirable Augusta!" cried Mrs. Mordaunt, clasping her to her heart, "I can

only say that you have behaved just as I should have expected of you. Your conduct is beyond all praise; and I feel a comfortable persuasion, that in nobly securing the happiness of others, you will be rewarded by finding that you have likewise secured your own."

For several moments Augusta was too much overcome to make any reply; but at length she exerted herself to speak.

"There is one request," she remarked, "which I trust you will not refuse to grant. Nothing but my extreme anxiety to relieve your apprehensions could have now induced me to talk to you of secrets which cannot properly be called my own, and which were imparted to me in the strictest confidence. Will you therefore have the kindness to promise me that you will never repeat our present conversation to any one?—particularly not to papa or to my brothers?"

"Certainly, if you desire it: and, upon consideration, I think the wish you have expressed is very judicious, as well as honourable to your feelings."

Mrs. Mordaunt was so rejoiced to find that the misfortune she had dreaded had been warded off, that she readily suppressed all farther inquiries upon the subject. Her an-

xious interest about her family had enabled her, in the first instance, to discover the exact nature of the danger which had threatened them; and her quickness now led her to guess pretty clearly, from the hints that had been thrown out by Augusta, who the mysterious competitor for Mordaunt was, and likewise to divine by what means he had been prevailed upon to relinquish his claims.

To do her justice, she believed that her daughter would be very comfortable and happy in the marriage she had consented to enter into. She perhaps imagined that she might now feel no great affection for Mr. Stafford; but she quieted her conscience by reflecting that love-matches did not always turn out the best; and as she knew that Augusta had refused Lord Delmore before she had the least suspicion of the insecurity of her father's fortune, she fancied that she could not have any other attachment.

Had the heir of Mordaunt declared himself, and established his right to his maternal estate, Mrs. Mordaunt was aware that the husband to whom she had for so many years been faithfully devoted must have been reduced to more straitened circumstances than even those in which he had been placed in his earlier days:—

soured by mortification, he had nothing to cheer him under comfort, and nothing but difficulties forward to in the future. Her son , in whom she felt so just a pride, could have had no resource but endeavouring to reinstate himself in an active situation in the army; and if he had been fortunate enough to succeed, he must have plodded on in his profession with blighted prospects, and perhaps a broken heart. And Edward—poor Edward! could have expected no better fate than exchanging the hopes of Mordaunt Rectory for an unprofitable curacy elsewhere.

All these considerations, added perchance to a selfish dread of the anguish it would have given her to witness and to share the sorrows of those most dear to her, led Mrs. Mordaunt to rejoice more and more at her daughter's generosity, in having purchased for them a continuance of that prosperity upon which she placed so high a value; and in the general relief and satisfaction this gave her, she did not attempt too narrowly to scutinize the exact price she had paid for it.

When her husband afterwards related to her the extraordinary suspicions that had been suggested to him by Charles, and the still more

extraordinary confession they had elicited from Mr. Stafford, she expressed her surprise at the whole story, and her delight at its having been cleared up in so comfortable a manner. She did not tell Mr. Mordaunt that she strangely misdoubted the statement of their future son-in-law: it was clear to her apprehension that he must have deceived either him or Augusta; but since his claim was entirely set at rest, she thought it very immaterial which might be the true version of the tale, and she determined not to disturb her husband's present security by any ill-timed or injudicious investigations.

Mr. Stafford was anxious to see Augusta as speedily as possible, that he might give her an account of the visit he had received from her father, and explain to her the point of view in which he had represented his case to him and to her brother. He described the *ruse* he had employed, and dwelt with complacent self-satisfaction upon his own ingenuity in having thought of it.

Augusta did not seem quite to share his admiration of it.

"And did you really impose this falsehood upon papa?" she said. "Poor Mrs. Stafford too! She never wronged you, yet you have most unjustly taken away her character."

"Mrs. Stafford was *not* my mother," replied Mr. Stafford in a tone of pique; "and surely it is better she should have been innocent than guilty of the charge I brought against her. If I had told your father the truth, you may easily guess, I think, what would have been the consequence."

"Alas! I may indeed!—It is a sad thing to be obliged to have recourse to a plan of concealment, since it entails upon us such an endless train of anxiety and deceit."

Augusta had at this juncture begun almost to doubt if the line of conduct she had pursued had, after all, been a justifiable one; but the sort of half confidence she had reposed in her mother proved a source of great comfort and support to her mind. Mrs. Mordaunt's approbation satisfied her that the step she had taken was praiseworthy and unobjectionable, and thus removed the most painful part of her inquietude.

When Colonel Mordaunt entered the drawing-room before dinner, it afforded his sister great pleasure to remark the happy alteration that had taken place in his whole appearance since breakfast.

In the evening he seated himself beside her with his former affectionate cordiality, and told

her he was going to give her a description of his wanderings in quest of a certain fugitive dame, who was not to be found in one place because she happened to be gone to another.

"I need not now be afraid," he added, "of distressing you by detailing my alarms; as I understand from Stafford that he made you acquainted with the secret of his birth before you engaged yourself to marry him."

"He did," replied Augusta—"and a very unpleasant secret it is; I do not like to dwell upon it. Yet," continued she more gaily, "it would be rather unnatural in us to feel less favourably towards him because we have discovered that he is our cousin."

"To be sure it would: that circumstance cannot possibly reflect any personal blame upon him."

And Charles proceeded to describe his visit to Mary Barker, and his journey to Ireland. He also painted his own horror and dismay during the time he had believed that Mr. Stafford was a legitimate son of Mr. O'Donnel's.

"I will own to you, Augusta," he said, "that once or twice in my agony I half suspected you had sold your hand to Stafford, upon condition that he would renounce his right to the broad lands of Mordaunt. The very idea was

dreadful! And you know me well enough to be aware, that if I had seen reason to think it well-founded, no earthly consideration should ever have induced me to allow—to consent, to such a generous sacrifice."

Augusta could not help becoming very red; yet a violent effort enabled her to maintain her composure of manner, and Charles did not perceive how deeply his random-shot had taken effect.

"As confessions seem to be quite the fashion to-day," she observed with a forced smile, "I feel very much tempted to make you one myself." She paused. "Do you remember, Charles, a conversation we once had upon the subject of your friend Lord Delmore?"

"Most perfectly," answered her brother.

"I then told you that, from circumstances in his conduct, I had been led to form a very unfavourable opinion of his character."

"I recollect your saying so very well."

"I am now anxious to acknowledge," continued Augusta in a steady voice, "that I did Lord Delmore great, though unintentional injustice. I have since discovered that the unworthy action of which I then believed he had been guilty—that the deed which would have reflected deep dishonour upon any one, never



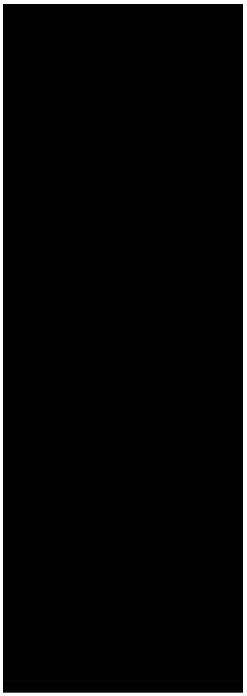
observed Charles. "W
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"It is a great satisfac
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office."

"Then I must inform
Stafford. He accidentall

"Did Stafford indeed justify his former rival in your eyes!" exclaimed Charles with great surprise. "It was noble, it was generous conduct upon his part, and it raises his own character very much in my estimation. All that I have seen of my future brother-in-law to-day, induces me to think much more highly of him than I ever did before, and to hope that you will prove as happy as I wish you in the choice that you have made. You must excuse me, dearest Augusta, if I add that there is only one thing which I cannot quite pardon Stafford, —and that is his having persuaded you to like him better than poor Lionel."



CHAP

—— "Speak we again
For my soul's sake!—
His country, birth, and
And then we will hear
—— "Let me see more
No more! I know that

About a week before
to take place. Lady A
to dine at Mr. Marsh
expected to dine that
arrive, and just when
was beginning to feel
he sent a hurried mes
appearance. He said,
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he would feared he mig

gusta, and to assure her he should see her the instant he returned to town.

Mr. Mordaunt read Mr. Stafford's note to himself, and then aloud to the family party, without making any comment upon its contents. Charles shrugged his shoulders, and watched his sister's countenance. Her agitation was greater than the occasion seemed quite to call for; and he observed that during the whole evening both she and his mother were unable to conceal their uneasiness.

Lady Agnes perceived that something was not right, but she could not make out what it was; and as Charles and Augusta were evidently not disposed to be communicative, she forbore to distress them by any curious inquiries. She had already been informed that Lady Estonville's carriage was come to take her home; when a servant brought a letter to Mr. Mordaunt, which he told him had been just left by a gentleman who had not given his name or his address.

"Then of course it does not require an immediate answer," remarked Mr. Mordaunt to himself as he broke the seal. The letter seemed to be short, yet he looked as if it perplexed and annoyed him.

"I cannot understand this," he muttered in

[redacted]

But although Lady Agnes thus tried to quiet Augusta's apprehensions, she did not feel altogether comfortable herself. Charles remarked this, and as he led her down stairs to the carriage, he whispered,—

"My father's letter was from a man who is now unknown to him even by name; but with whom he will soon become personally acquainted, as he writes to announce his intention of calling upon him at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning to make him an important communication. *I* suspect it will relate to the story I told you about Stafford; and if so, it may prove an annoyance, but cannot, I think, be attended with any seriously unpleasant consequences. You shall hear the result of his visit in the course of the day; and in the mean while you possess as much information as I do. I should have said all this to you before, but I was afraid of alarming poor Augusta, who looks miserable enough already."

The stranger kept his appointment very punctually. He was a grave, stiff-looking man, past the middle age; and his complexion bore testimony to his having spent the earlier part of his life in India. He was announced as Mr. Hope, and he spoke with a slightly Scotch accent.

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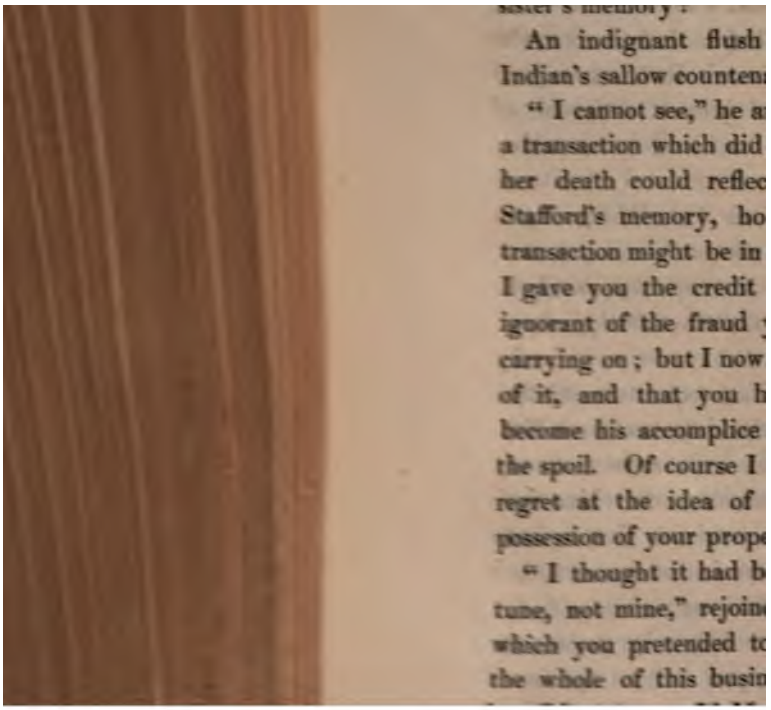
himself Mr. Stafford was my wife's nephew, and as I was told he was engaged to be married to Miss Mordaunt, I imagined some weeks ago there was very little probability that my children would ever inherit more than their mother's original share of Mr. Oram's fortune; but a most extraordinary discovery has recently shown me that they are legally entitled to possess the whole of it."

"I do not understand, sir," replied Mr. Mordaunt haughtily, "how you can possibly prove that to be the case. Mr. Stafford will not, I fancy, very readily admit the validity of so preposterous a claim."

"I expect that he will dispute it to the utmost of his power," rejoined Mr. Hope coolly: "but I have a witness whom he little suspects that I can bring forward against him, and whose evidence will incontestibly establish that he has no right to bear the name he has assumed, or to enjoy Mrs. Stafford's fortune;—who will, in short, declare and prove him to be the son of Mr. O'Donnel."

Mr. Mordaunt was not surprised, but he was rather disconcerted, by so direct a statement.

"I beg you to observe, sir," he said, "that I acquiesce in nothing you have advanced; but for the sake of argument, if I were to allow the



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carrying on; but I now
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become his accomplice
the spoil. Of course I
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possession of your prop
"I thought it had b
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the whole of this busi

"She will do so, sir," replied Mr. Hope: "indeed, the course you are so obliging as to recommend, is exactly the one I should have advised her to pursue, had I known as much as I do at present. But before I came here this morning, it occurred to me that, when your future son-in-law found himself deprived of Mrs. Stafford's wealth, he would in all probability endeavour to wrest his natural inheritance from *you*, and I therefore wished to give you timely warning of your danger."

"I do not pretend to conjecture, sir," remarked Mr. Mordaunt contemptuously," upon what ground you affect to suppose your family are entitled to obtain from my future relation the property that descended to him from Mrs. Stafford; I have consequently nothing to say to you upon that point. But how Mr. Stafford can, in any event, have the least right to disturb me in the enjoyment of my estate, I confess I cannot possibly imagine."

"As Mr. Stafford, he certainly could not; but as Mr. O'Donnel, you will, I presume, allow that the case would be very different."

Mr. Mordaunt was staggered; and he abated much of his former haughtiness of manner, as he remarked,

"There must, I think, be some misunder-

[redacted]

"Of course, Mr. Hope, I am anxious to endeavour to persuade myself that you may have been mistaken; but I must confess that your story bears a fearful stamp of truth. If I unfortunately find hereafter that you have stated the affair accurately, I have been basely deceived by Mr. Stafford. I give you my word of honour that I had no idea of his being Mrs. O'Donnel's son; and should you be able to convince me that he is so, I trust you will pardon the ungracious manner in which I have received what I should then consider a very kind communication upon your part."

"Your present behaviour, sir," replied Mr. Hope, "assures me that you had been (as I originally supposed) kept in ignorance of the secret of your cousin's existence: I therefore know how to make allowance for the natural irritation which any person under your circumstances might be expected to experience. I feel for you sincerely; and I will, if you please, give you all the information I possess about Mr. O'Donnel."

He then proceeded to describe those particulars of the exchange of the children which have been already narrated; and when he took his departure, he left a conviction upon Mr.

[redacted]

transact, and upon these occasions he generally travelled in the mail. His journey in that way this year proved very eventful to him, as it brought him into contact with our old acquaintance Susan Leary.

When first Susan was established at Blossomdale, she found herself very comfortable, and was well satisfied with her situation. But after Lady Caroline Mortimer had circulated reports about a mysterious claimant to the Mordaunt estate, and Charles Mordaunt had travelled over England and Ireland to endeavour to trace their origin, Mr. Stafford thought it would be no longer safe to permit Mrs. Leary to receive visits from strangers. He despatched Raymond a second time into the country, and, under pretence of having learned that Susan's intellect was much more seriously affected than he had formerly believed, he directed him to give strict orders to the people with whom she lived, to keep her always in their sight, and upon no account to allow her to enter into conversation with anybody who was not well known to them.

The old woman soon perceived that she was watched; and this sort of surveillance became extremely disagreeable to her, and began really to prey upon her mind. She felt excessively

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cured her place, he asked her no farther questions; and she was speedily taken up and conveyed towards London.

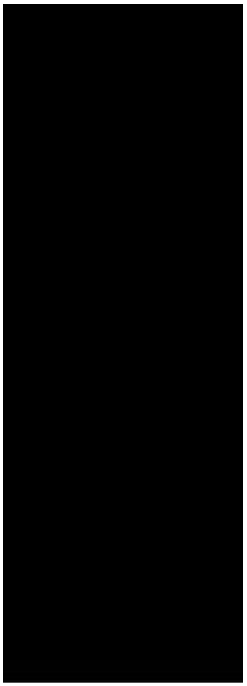
There was only one other inside passenger, a gentleman; and this gentleman happened to be Mr. Hope. He seemed asleep,—at least he took no notice of his companion; but when the day dawned, he perceived that she was a person of extraordinary and very unprepossessing appearance. He was wondering who she could possibly be, when she startled him considerably by suddenly asking him if he could tell her where the young gentleman lived in London who was called Mr. Stafford.

"I know at present of only one gentleman of that name," he replied; "and I believe that he resides in Grosvenor-street. He is probably the same person you mean; for, if I am not mistaken, he has a place very near the spot where we took you up last night."

"You are right," observed Susan drily: "he has a country-house thereabouts, called Blossomdale."

"And you are a tenant of his, I presume?"

"I do not belong to that country; but I have lived lately in one of his cottages, and I am now going to London on purpose to see my young master."



He asked her various questions about him; and as he was a shrewd, intelligent man, he soon conjectured from her hints, that she was in possession of some extraordinary secret connected with his history.

By pretending to know more than he really did, and by affecting to feel the greatest interest for all the O'Donnels, he contrived at length to persuade Susan to impart to him every circumstance relating to her 'dear young master' with which she was acquainted.

Flighty as the old woman was, he saw that she was sane enough to give evidence in a court of law; and he knew that her testimony alone could enable him to prove Mr. O'Donnel's identity.

Before they arrived in London, therefore, he told her, "it was the most fortunate thing in the world that she had met *him*, since nobody else would have had half so much pleasure in assisting her to establish Mr. O'Donnel's claim to his mother's inheritance;—that he suspected Raymond disliked him to declare who he was, because he could not do so without exposing *his* villany;—that if she attempted to see her master, or even to write to him, Raymond would find it out, and would carry her off to a stricter and more remote state of thraldom



afraid that any person should see her or discover who she was.

Mrs. Leary's flight from Blossomdale was immediately announced to Mr. Stafford by the people to whose care he had confided her, and it annoyed him a good deal. He made out that she had travelled to London by the mail, and that she had left the inn where it landed its passengers, in a hackney-coach, with an elderly gentleman, who had been her companion upon the road; but there all trace of her was lost, and he could never ascertain what had become of her afterwards.

As Mr. Hope was anxious to obtain other witnessess to corroborate the truth of Susan Leary's statement, he went over to Ireland, and by her direction conversed with various old people, who confirmed and elucidated different points of her narrative in a very satisfactory manner. He also saw the servant who had assisted Raymond a few months before in disinterring the little Stafford's remains; and this man drew up for him in writing a minute account of that circumstance, and of the injunctions to secrecy which he had received from the two strangers.

These investigations only occupied a short

sister's fortune.

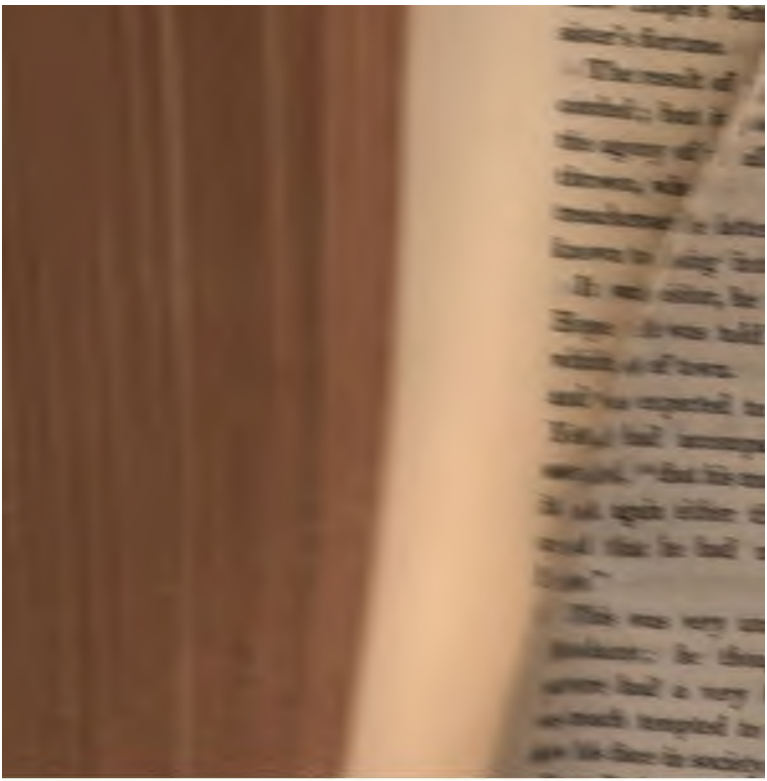
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lip Mortimer, although even the delay of his wedding would prove fatal to them as well as to himself. He considered also, that if he were really to be deprived of the fortune of his adopted parent, it would be no longer in his power to fulfil the compact he had entered into with Miss Mordaunt; and consequently that he could scarcely expect her to abide by it, particularly as he was painfully aware that her inclination would not prompt her to do so.

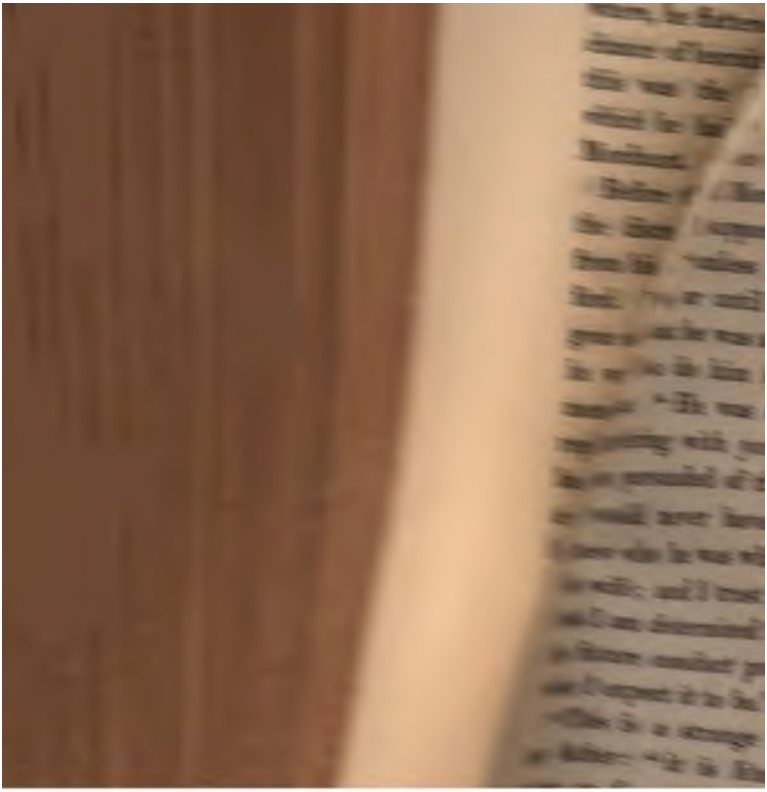
At length he arrived at the conclusion, that the only course he could pursue was strenuously to endeavour to prevent Mr. Hope from establishing the fact of his nephew's death. If he could make Philip Mortimer believe that the whole story was likely to prove a malicious fabrication, he fancied he might prevail upon him to extend the term of their original agreement for six months or another year, should it become necessary; and thus one difficulty would be set at rest.

Mr. Stafford suspected it must have been Susan Leary who had betrayed his exchange to Mr. Hope; and he was convinced that, if he could get hold of the old woman again, her affection for himself was so strong that he could easily induce her to contradict anything she



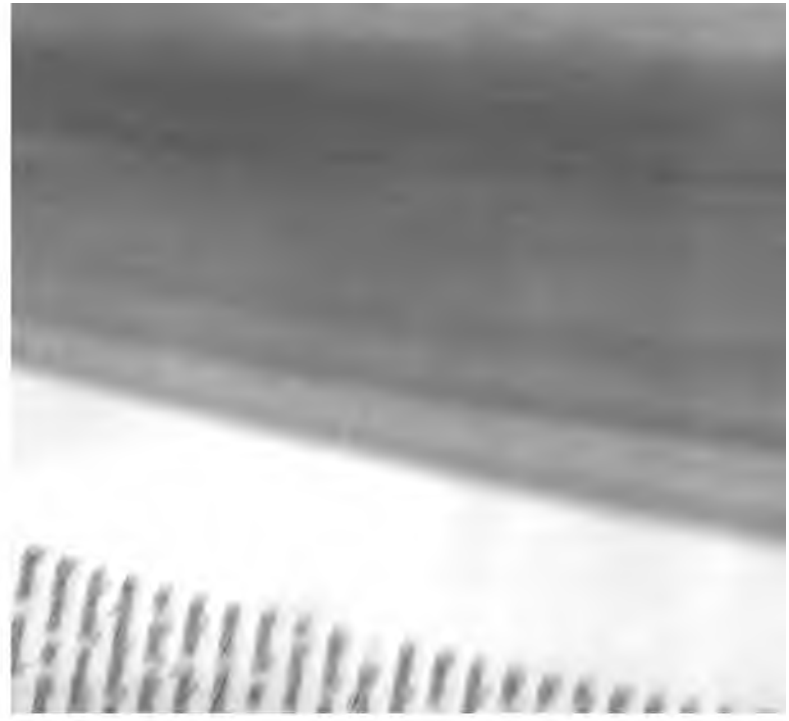
and children round
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despair; Charles received
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spoke with perfect composure
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ay before, she had suspected that
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she had made up her mind upon the
nduct she believed it would be *her*
adopt whenever the hour of trial

My poor child!" said Mr. Mordaunt, at th particularly addressing himself to his ughter, "you have not yet told us your pinion of Stafford's behaviour. If *you* can orgive him for having deceived you, *I* shall not easily be able to follow your example. I trust you do not very much care for him; and in that case, you may find reason to rejoice that you are not already united to him for life. Were I to suppose you really attached to him, I should indeed pity you most heartily."



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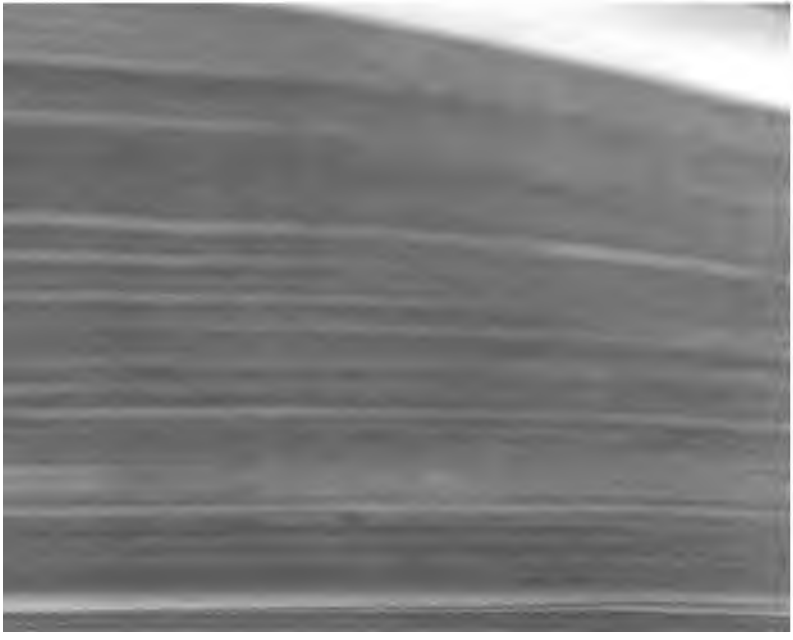
ordaunt started at this proposal, and
sing pang of shame and distress thrilled
h his whole frame.
t surely is not necessary," he argued, "to
unce it to them quite so soon."
"Alas!" answered Charles, "I feel that it
ould be both dishonourable and unkind to
conceal from them for an instant a circum-
stance of such deep importance. Besides, Mr.
O'Donnel's existence will speedily be published
to all the world; and how could I forgive my-
self, if a rumour of it were to reach them from
any other quarter before it had been properly
communicated to them by me?"
"I believe you are right, my dear boy,"



family of their wealth. Upon the whole, therefore, she rejoiced rather than grieved at an *éclaircissement* which had brought the truth to light.

She had long taught herself to forget, or at least totally to disregard, her own personal feelings and wishes; and her mind was now completely absorbed by her anxiety to secure as many advantages as possible to her parents and to her brothers from the wreck of their present property.

She had learned a lesson from Mr. Stafford which she meditated putting into practice. She knew that their mutual engagement was dissolved by his inability to perform his part of it; she had no doubt he would be desirous to enter into a new one; and she resolved to obtain from him such conditions as she thought *she* had a right to demand, and she fancied *he* could not in equity dare refuse to grant her. In short, she determined to save him from absolute ruin, by consenting to marry him within the year specified in his agreement with Philip Mortimer; but to stipulate that he should solemnly bind himself in return to settle a handsome provision upon her father out of the Mordaunt estate, and to insist to him upon



Charl
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Agnes; ye
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He inquir
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"I thought you would come, Charles," said Lady Agnes as she rose to welcome him; "and I told mamma I wished to stay at home to receive you."

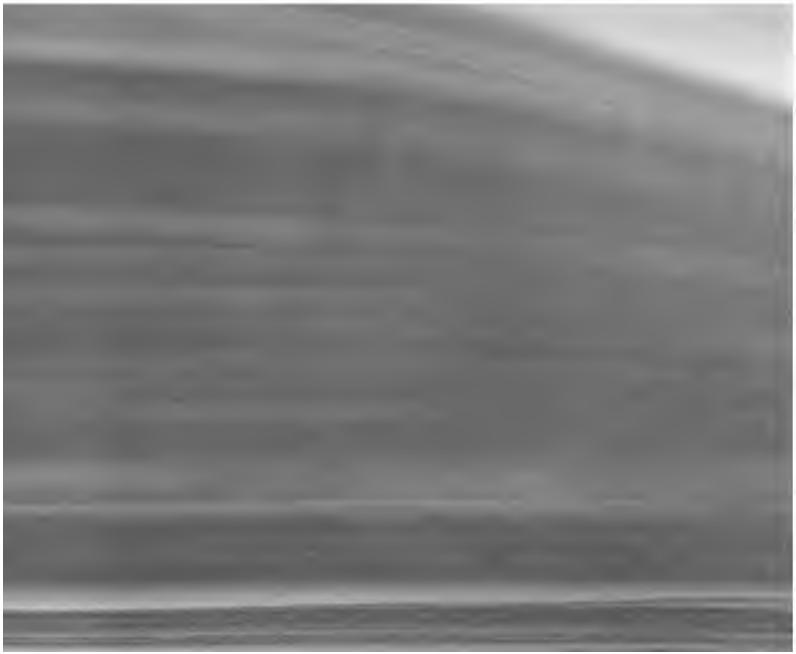
"Thank you, dear Agnes," he replied: "I *am* come, but you will find me a very sorry visitor. I hope that what passed last night has in some degree prepared you to expect that I am fated to be the bearer of evil and disastrous tidings." And he immediately related to her very minutely all the particulars of Mr. Stafford's history.

Lady Agnes paid the deepest attention to his narration: she turned unusually pale, and the traces of violent agitation were occasionally perceptible in her countenance; but she did not interrupt him by a single remark: when she had heard all that he had to tell her, she merely observed,—

"This is indeed a most unexpected and grievous discovery; but you have at least the comfort of reflecting that no blame attaches to *you*, or to any of *your* family."

Charles felt rather hurt by the calmness with which she had spoken.

"No," replied he proudly, "our integrity and our honour will, I trust, always remain



d when I considered you the heir of Mor-aunt? It was not your father's broad lands, ut your own personal merit, that engaged my ffections. It was formerly *your* intention to ave endowed me with your wealth, and I now declare to you that it is *my* firm determination to share with you your poverty."

"This is too much!" cried he, as he seized her hand and pressed it fervently to his lips. "To the latest hour of my existence I shall retain the liveliest — the most grateful recollection of your noble and generous conduct; but, dearest Agnes, I cannot consent to your doing what you so kindly, so magnanimously propose. It cannot—must not be! Believe me, I love you far too well to allow you to involve yourself in discomfort and distress for my sake."

"I am afraid you consider me a very extravagant person," replied Lady Agnes, "since you imagine it impossible that I can live happily upon a small fortune. You have forgotten that I have no ambitious ideas, no expensive habits; that I do not care for London, or London society; and, in short, that most of the advantages of wealth would be quite thrown away upon *me*. You are aware, too, that Caroline renders my present situation at home in many respects anything but a pleasant one."





upon my part to repeat to him the substance of what I have just communicated to *you*."

"You ought certainly to do this, and I think you will now find him at home; he came up here to fetch some papers a few moments before you arrived."

"I will go to his room immediately. I fear he is engaged; but *my* explanation will not interrupt him long, for I am convinced he will look upon my case just in the same point of view that I do myself."

"I am not sure that he will," replied Lady Agnes. "My father has a sincere regard for you, and he has always treated me with the most affectionate kindness. For your own sake, as well as for mine, I believe he would make greater exertions to assist *you* than he would be inclined to do to assist almost anybody else."

Charles shook his head.

"I am gratefully sensible," he said, "of Lord Estonville's uniform kindness to me, and I am convinced that he would still be willing to give me any reasonable proof of his esteem; but he naturally must feel a prudent concern for the worldly interest of his children, and his very affection for you will of course point out to him the impossibility of consenting to allow



alas! I fear that it must be to take leave of you for ever."

He hurried out of the room, for he dared not trust himself to hear a syllable more, or even to look at Lady Agnes, lest her distress should overcome him.

A gentle tap at the door of Lord Estonville's library obtained Colonel Mordaunt admittance to a private audience with the earl. The latter looked rather surprised at his appearance there, yet he received him with the warmest cordiality, and prepared to give the most flattering attention to whatever his future son-in-law might have to say to him.

Poor Charles's disclosure was soon and simply made, and he perceived that Lord Estonville heard it with deep and real concern.

"This is one of the most distressing as well as the most astonishing stories imaginable!" he observed; "and your father's is indeed a case of very peculiar hardship. I pity and feel for you all, my dear Colonel Mordaunt, far more than I am able to express to you."

Charles thanked him for his kind sympathy, and then added in a more unsteady voice, "that since his future prospects had now become so very different from what they had formerly promised to be, he felt himself painfully



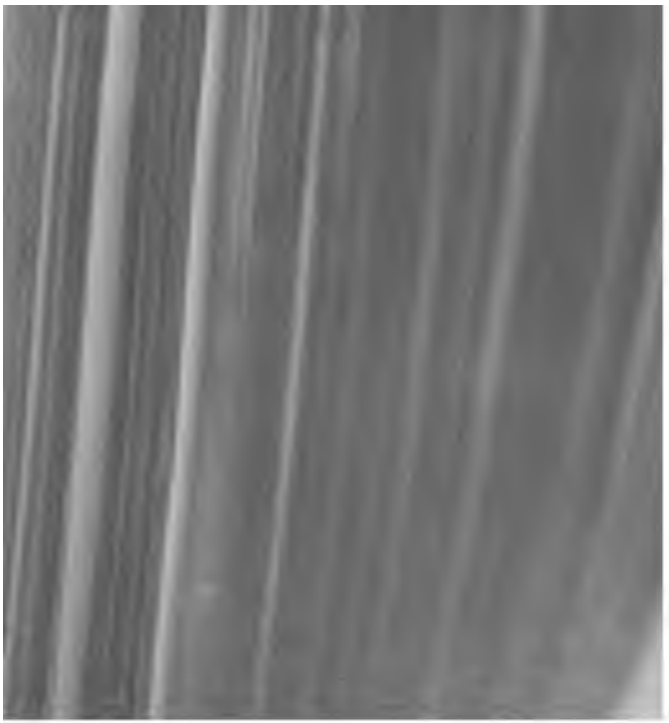
your esteem, which, believe me, valued very highly. I am not ortunate person in the world, and deavour to submit with patience to se fate."

Estonville reiterated his assurances p interest in Mr. Mordaunt's concerns; ged to be constantly informed of the progress Mr. Hope's proceedings; and dismissed his happy visitor with professions of unalterable friendship and regard.

Charles had expected that Lord Estonville would no longer deem it practicable that he should become the husband of Lady Agnes; but he felt hurt and mortified by the ease with which he had permitted him to relinquish his engagement, and the little real consideration he had shown for his disappointment. In bitterness of spirit he was hurrying across the hall to leave the house, when he heard his name pronounced by some one upon the landing-place above him: he looked up, and saw Lady Agnes leaning over the balustrade, where she had evidently been watching for him.

"Will you come here for a moment?" she said, as soon as she caught his eye. "I just want to speak to you before you go away."

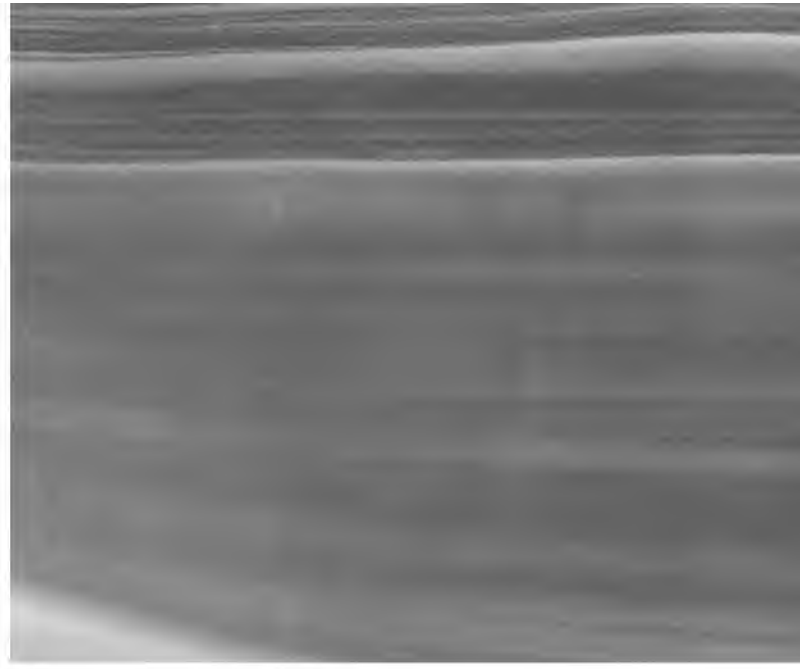
The summons was irresistible. Charles im-



distress yourself upon my account. Believe me, nothing would make me so miserable—so perfectly wretched, as to think that I had rendered *you* unhappy. I mentioned to Lord Estonville my intention of discontinuing to come here at present, and he entirely approved of it. I must now leave you, for I have already lingered longer than I ought to have done. Farewell! and may Heaven bless and comfort you!"

Colonel Mordaunt saw nothing—observed nobody, as he walked, or rather ran, from Lord Estonville's abode. He did not proceed directly home, but crossed the Park, and, without knowing exactly where he was going, plunged into the most retired part of Kensington Gardens, where he wandered about for several hours in a state of mind almost bordering upon distraction.

Lady Caroline Mortimer was excessively astonished and violently agitated when her father told her who had proved to be the pretender to the Mordaunt estate, whose claim she had more than once darkly hinted to him. She foresaw in an instant all the consequences that might result from this discovery; but she was too selfish to feel much for the distress of others, or really to care for what did not per-



rse grace than she had formerly done, and r relations knew her too well to be imposed pon by her hypocrisy.

The story of Mr. Stafford's having been exhanged by his nurse, and discovered to be Mr. O'Donnel's son, and consequently the heir of Mordaunt, was speedily published to the world, and repeated from mouth to mouth with sundry additions and variations.

No other topic was thought of, or talked of, for several days. People wondered, and lamented, and pitied "the poor Mordaunts," and censured the late Mr. Stafford, and speculated upon the effect this discovery might have in promoting or breaking off Augusta's projected marriage with her *cousin;* and expressed an eager anxiety to know what Lord Estonville would say to the business—how poor Lady Agnes would bear her second disappointment—and whether it would prove a cause of joy or sorrow to Lady Caroline.

Yet, in spite of all the sentimental interest that was thus loudly expressed for the sufferers, it is probable that, beyond the desire of being able to gratify their own idle curiosity, few if any of their "dear friends" felt any real concern about them, or cared one straw what was to become of them in their poverty.



present. Mr. Hope has
claim to the Stafford pro-
he fail in establishing it, as
I can most solemnly assure
my intention never to touch a
s. O'Donnel's inheritance."
l of course act as you think proper
point, Mr. O'Donnel," observed Mr.
t; "but you must allow me to tell
t it has not hitherto, and never will be
actice, to retain any fortune that I am
belongs rightfully to another person."
r. Stafford felt this rebuke keenly, and his
ntenance assumed for an instant its most
minous and vindictive expression.

"I did not mean to offend you," continued Mr. Mordaunt in a more conciliatory tone; "but I deemed it necessary that we should clearly understand each other, which I trust that we now do. We will, if you please, adjourn to the drawing-room, as my daughter is very anxious to see you."

Augusta's manner towards her cousin was more flattering than he had expected it to be, and he was encouraged and gratified by her kindness. As soon as they found themselves *tête-à-tête*, she briefly explained to him the line of conduct she intended to pursue, and distinctly



l;—and, if you will take my advice, the wisest d most honourable course you can pursue ill be to surrender Mrs. Stafford's fortune uietly and handsomely to Mrs. Hope, and hen decide what provision you propose to eserve for my father out of your own estate, fter your debt to Mr. Mortimer has been got id of."

Mr. O'Donnel (for it would be absurd to all him longer Mr. Stafford) did not at all like this counsel.

"Augusta," he said rather testily, "you really do not understand what you have been talking about. I will do everything that is reasonable for your father; but you are too *exigeante:* you seem to think it is my duty to give him up the half of my fortune. You must recollect that the Mordaunt property is a much less valuable one than that which I now possess; and as I fancy that Mr. Mordaunt has dipped into it pretty deeply, it is quite out of the question that I can afford to alienate any considerable part of it."

Augusta looked hurt and disappointed.

"As Mr. Hope's disclosure," she observed laconically, "has shown us that we all belong to the same family, and will soon involve us in the same general distress, I hoped you would

have entered warmly into my idea, that it is desirable we should all make common cause, and endeavour to assist one another in our difficulties; but since I find that this is not to be the case, and as I see that I am mistaken in the opinion I had formed of you, you must allow me to tell you, that it is quite out of the question I can ever have the honour of becoming Mrs. O'Donnel."

Mr. O'Donnel perceived he had gone too far, and that he must attempt to soothe his cousin by adopting a tone of compliance. They felt, in truth, mutually angry and indignant; yet each had an object of such deep interest to carry, that neither dared proceed to a direct quarrel. They had become so completely fettered by circumstances, that they had no free will left; and they both felt it was impossible to relinquish an alliance, the accomplishment of which was essentially necessary to their worldly prosperity.

After a long discussion, Augusta consented to renew her former promise, and Mr. O'Donnel engaged to bind himself to perform all the conditions she annexed to it. He said, "that if a delay should be unavoidable, he had no doubt he could easily persuade Philip Mortimer to give him a little longer credit; as he

had the power of assuring him that his marriage was still *bonâ fide* going on, and would be celebrated as soon as possible."

The cousins parted—not like an attached *promis* and *promise*, but secretly dissatisfied with each other. Both were mortified, disappointed, and uncomfortable: they found their present situation extremely irksome, and their future prospects promised anything but happiness.

Mr. O'Donnel came again to Mr. Mordaunt's in the evening. He whispered to Augusta, "that he had found Philip Mortimer, and that his business with *him* was most satisfactorily settled." And then he told her father aloud, "that he had been endeavouring in vain to see Mr. Hope: that the only intelligence of him he had been able to obtain was, that he had actually commenced a legal process against him, and that he had just set out for Scotland to bring his wife and family to London. It is my intention," he added, "to follow him immediately to the North; as it is absolutely necessary that I should have an explanation with him before any farther steps are taken by the lawyers."

Mr. Mordaunt fully assented to the propriety of this measure, but asked no questions

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be punished for having connived at an act of fraud, injustice, and deceit.

Mrs. Mordaunt watched her daughter with grief and anxiety; but as she now imagined a real attachment for Mr. O'Donnel could be the only motive that still decided her to wish to marry him, she was far from suspecting the true secret of her conduct: she naturally attributed her evident uneasiness and depression of spirits to concern upon her father's and upon Charles's account, mingled too with shame and vexation at the unworthy figure she could not conceal from herself that her affianced husband had made in the eyes of the world.

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Lady Agnes did not think this very kind; but she was much touched by an affectionate letter from Augusta, in which she expressed with great warmth and tenderness how sincerely she sympathised in all her feelings; and concluded by remarking, "that this sad business had altogether made her so very wretched, that she felt quite unequal to talking it over with her at present."

Poor Lady Agnes might indeed well have claimed the deepest commiseration her friend could bestow upon her. The fatal blow which had just destroyed her hopes of happiness, had fallen upon her the more heavily from being quite unexpected; and although her strong religious principles forbade her to give way to despondency, her spirit appeared to be nearly crushed by it.

Lord Delmore's death had formerly cast a gloom over her natural cheerfulness, but it was only for a time; she had mourned him, not as a lover, but rather as a valued relation and friend. She had never entertained for him the same sort of attachment with which Colonel Mordaunt had inspired her; and the idea that he was removed to a more blissful existence, had, by insensible degrees, soon reconciled her to his loss.



"Well, then," continued Lord Delmore, "I must state it to you. You never wrote me word of this disagreeable business of the Mordaunts — you did not let me know that you were in distress. Charles, I confess, sent me a few hurried lines; but they were so unintelligible, that if I had not heard the details of the story from common report, I should have been incapable of comprehending what had happened to him."

"I ought to have written to you, certainly," said Lady Agnes: "I take great shame to myself for not having done so. Had I had any pleasant intelligence to communicate, you should have learned it soon enough; but I felt a sort of silly reluctance at the idea of tormenting you with bad news."

"You have not made a very good defence," pursued Lionel; "but as I have not the heart to scold you, I believe I must forgive you: and if I now freely pardon your neglect, it must be only upon one condition,—you must promise to grant me a favour in return."

"That I will very readily do, if it is in my power," replied Lady Agnes: "you have merely to tell me what it is you wish."

"Thank you, dear Agnes. The boon I crave is, that you will assist me to show my

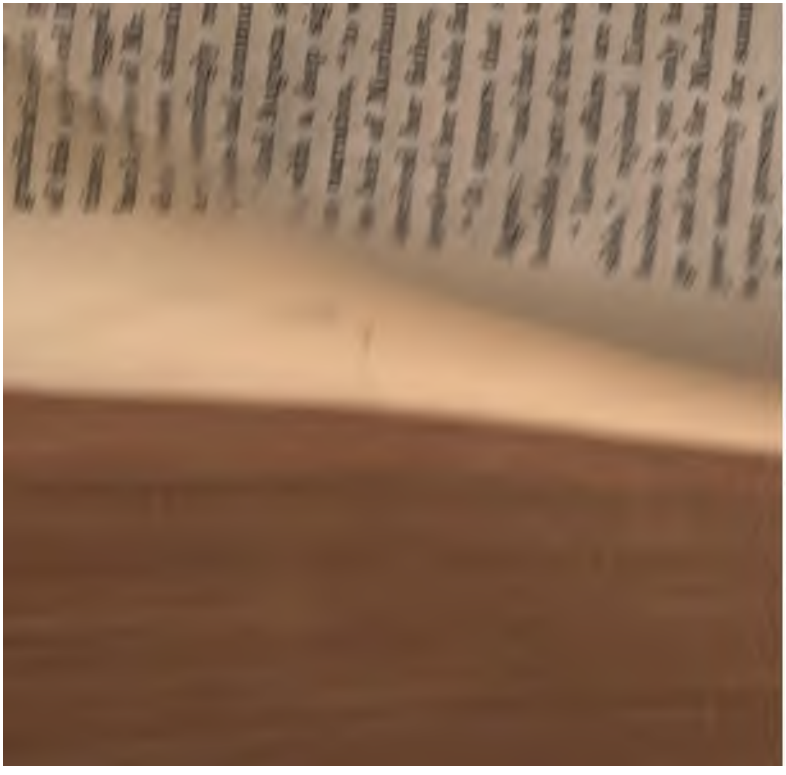
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upon such a subject?" answered Lord Delmore: "and as for my generosity, it consists, in this instance, simply in pleasing myself."

"No, no," cried Lady Agnes, bursting into tears. "I am quite overpowered by your kindness," she added: "I cannot in words express to you what I feel,—I can only fervently pray that Heaven may reward your goodness as it deserves."

"Pray do not talk in this way," continued Lionel, as he turned aside his face to conceal his emotion: "you make me perfectly foolish. *You* have already amply rewarded me for the trouble of my journey, by listening propitiously to my proposal. This detestable fellow, Stafford, or O'Donnel, or whatever he is now called, may have destroyed the happiness of my life; but he can never be able to render me completely miserable, while I feel that I have had it in my power to secure to you and Charles the blessings of domestic comfort."

"You certainly have the art," observed Lady Agnes, "not only of doing the kindest and noblest things, but also of placing them in the most gracious and agreeable point of view. But, Lionel, what will your friend say to your plan?—you know how proud-spirited he is?"



m to Lord Estonville to
or was suddenly opened,
announcement, the person
eaking of—Charles Mordaunt
before them.

ssion of his countenance was so
haggard, and his whole appearance
much altered, that Lord Delmore did
first recognise him, and Lady Agnes
scarcely suppress an exclamation of alarm.
addressed her gently, but almost incoherently; and then turning to her companion,—

"Lionel here too!" he said, in an accent of surprise:—"How long have *you* been in town?" And as he pronounced these words, he wrung his friend's hand very warmly.

"I am only just arrived," replied Lord Delmore. And as he fancied from Charles's manner that he had something of importance to communicate to Lady Agnes, he immediately added,—"My first visit, as you see, has been made *here;* but it is now high time that I should pay my respects to my aunt, and my compliments to my cousin Caroline. When those duties are performed, I will return to you."

"Indeed you must not and shall not go away," said Lady Agnes, placing her hand

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derstand what dreadful circumstance it is that you allude to. We are not aware that any fearful event has taken place; and there certainly is nothing that can shock the most delicate feelings in what my cousin was going to announce to you."

"Thank God, I was mistaken then!" ejaculated Charles. "I ought to have known it was impossible that Agnes could have spoken in that way about such an occurrence."

These words were uttered with rapidity, and in a sort of indistinct soliloquy. After an instant's pause, he continued more collectedly,—

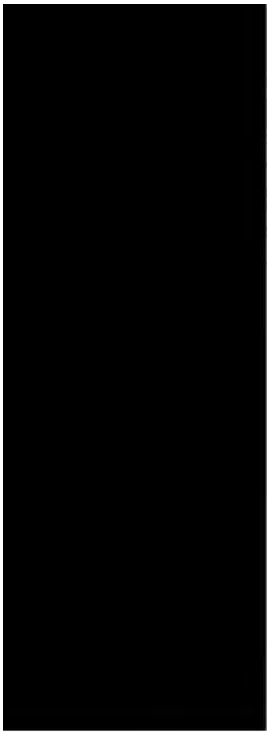
"You are right, Delmore: you cannot be aware that I came here for the purpose of telling your cousin that another unexpected revolution has taken place in my father's affairs, —of breaking to her, in short, that poor O'Donnel can never trouble us more."

Lady Agnes's countenance became animated by an expression of eager curiosity.

"What can you mean?" exclaimed Lionel. "Is he dead?"

"He is," replied Charles in a subdued tone: "he died by his own hand!"

A silence of some moments succeeded this annunciation. Both Lady Agnes and Lord Delmore were much shocked, and the awe and



This is really too much!" said Charles. never doubted the warmth and sincerity of r friendship, Delmore; but it is almost th while to have suffered what I have suf- d lately, to receive such a gratifying proof it. I shall always feel as much indebted to u for your intended kindness, as if I had tually profited by it, and owed my future ppiness entirely to your generosity."

Lord Estonville, who had heard accidentally f Lionel's arrival, now entered the room. He as much surprised to find Colonel Mordaunt lso; but a few words of explanation soon set verything right; and his lordship was per- fectly sincere when he assured Charles, "that he was unfeignedly delighted to be able to receive him again upon the same footing as formerly."

He made Lord Delmore promise to dine with him; and the latter then took Charles away:

"Come," said he,—"a walk with me will do you good; and Agnes will be all the better for being left for a little while with no other society than her own."

The tragical conclusion of Mr. O'Donnel's life may be briefly described.

When he reached Scotland, he found Mr.

Raymond made his appearance: he sent n a second letter, which was in course of ne returned to him in a cover from one of his her servants to whom his handwriting was nown; and who informed him, "that Mr. laymond had left the house a few hours after is own departure, and had never been seen here or heard of since,—but that it was much thought he was gone off to America." The truth was, that from the moment Raymond became aware that Mr. Hope had discovered his master's secret, he apprehended that the infamous part *he* had acted in the business would be brought to light; he consequently lost no time in converting everything he possessed into money; and when Mr. O'Donnel set out for Scotland, *he* took the opportunity of escaping across the Atlantic.

Raymond's flight was an unexpected blow to Mr. O'Donnel. He now saw that if he did not voluntarily surrender Mrs. Stafford's wealth, it would inevitably be taken from him by the arm of the law; and he was conscious that any endeavour upon his part to retain it, would only have the effect of exposing his own dishonesty to the public, and of lowering him in the estimation of the Mordaunts. He was tor-

mented by a thousand distressing reflections and ruin and disgrace rose in fearful and appalling forms before his imagination.

He had, before he left town, contrived to ascertain with tolerable accuracy the value of the Mordaunt estate; and if he had expected to come into it unencumbered, he might have looked forward to being able to enjoy a continuance of the luxuries which habit had so long rendered essential in his eyes. But a slight scrutiny into his own affairs had shown him they were in so embarrassed a state, that this could not be the case. He had been very extravagant, and at the same time very negligent about money matters; and he found he had a long arrear of debts, amounting altogether to a sum that both startled and amazed him. He knew that the convulsion which was about to take place in his affairs would render his creditors very clamorous; and he could devise no possible plan that might enable him to satisfy their demands. He recollected that Augusta had insisted upon his promising to make a handsome settlement upon her father; and he felt assured that if she found he had not the power of doing this, she would no longer consent to marry him. He shrunk with [illegible] the humiliating necessity of con-

fessing to Mr. Hope that he was prepared to abandon his claim to the disputed property, and of throwing himself upon his mercy not to exact from him the payment of the large sums he had expended since Mr. Stafford's death. "I have hitherto found him a stern person to deal with," he thought; "and if he now pursues me with all the rigour of the law, there is but one alternative!"

Mr. O'Donnel accordingly despatched a note to Mr. Hope, requesting to know at what hour it would be convenient for him to see him the following day.

The answer was laconic. "Mr. Hope presented his compliments to Mr. O'Donnel, and begged to decline having any further communication with him, except through the medium of his lawyer."

The unhappy man had not anticipated so decided a repulse, and it drove him at once to despair. He could not endure the prospect of being reduced to beggary; he had not strength of mind to bear the scorn of the world, and to be looked upon with contempt and neglect in that society where he had hitherto been treated with flattery and consideration. He fancied that he could not exist in poverty and retirement; he felt that he could at any rate

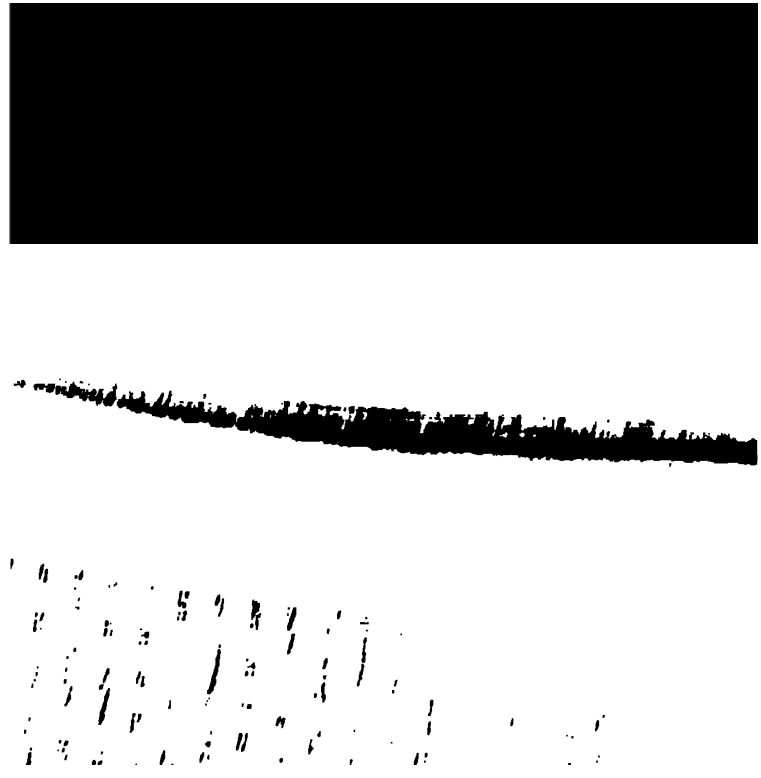
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and Mr. Hope also attended the funeral: the latter had been so much shocked by his death, that he was anxious to pay this public mark of respect to his memory.

The news of Mr. O'Donnel's suicide made a great sensation in the world, and his vanity would have been much soothed if he could have heard all the pity and concern that were expressed for him.

His failings were palliated or forgotten, while his merits were lauded and expatiated upon; and, like many other heroes who have been undervalued during their lives, his memory was sainted the instant it was known that he was dead.

Everybody declared "that poor Stafford" (for by that name he was still designated by those who had never addressed him by any other) "had been the best fellow in the world!" Nobody could deny that he had kept the best house and given the best dinners that were to be met with anywhere;—and, in short, it was universally acknowledged that his death was a sort of public loss, and that it had left a sensible blank in society.



Estonville, she told him with a smile, that he would, she believed, find Agnes and Lionel in the next room.—"As my nephew is only in town for a few days," she added, "Lord Estonville has persuaded him to take up his abode in this house."

Charles immediately joined the cousins. Both he and Lady Agnes had now come to a calm sense of their happiness; but although Lord Delmore participated in it very sincerely, a deep shade of melancholy occasionally came over his countenance. After some preliminary conversation, Lady Agnes inquired very kindly and anxiously about Augusta.

"She has been terribly overpowered, poor thing!" replied Charles. "I hope her health may not suffer materially from the severe trials she has undergone lately; but I confess I do not at all like her appearance this morning. I want to persuade you to come and see her, Agnes: I assure you, she is far more worthy of your esteem and affection than you have for some time believed her to be."

"I shall be delighted to visit her," said Lady Agnes, "if Mrs. Mordaunt is not afraid that my company will do her harm."

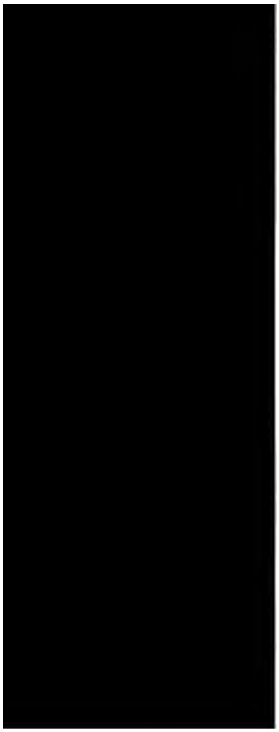
Lord Delmore had listened with earnest attention to every word his friend had spoken;



He was that indeed!" echoed Charles: "but s gone to render an account of his perfidy to heavenly Judge; and it is perhaps fortunate me that he was removed from this world fore I discovered the detestable game he had n playing. You, Lionel, ought however forgive him much, in consideration of the ly instance of generosity I ever heard re-orded in his favour. Augusta had been falsely nd maliciously led to believe that *you* had been guilty of a dishonourable action, which had rendered you perfectly unworthy of her regard; and that this was unknown to everybody but her informer, herself, and one other person. O'Donnel happened by some chance to find out the error into which she had been betrayed respecting you; he was convinced of your innocence, and he instantly proved to her that the accusation that had been brought against you was entirely unfounded."

Lord Delmore appeared for many moments to be wrapped in thought; at length he remarked aloud,—

"If I am indebted to Mr. O'Donnel for having re-established my character in Miss Mordaunt's good opinion, I may despise, but I can no longer hate his memory. May I ask you, Charles, what was the dark crime that was



all those painful secrets she had so
pt concealed.
ould be impossible for words to give an
te idea of the admiration and distress
hich her self-devotion inspired him.
his was too generous—too dreadful!" he
med. "Oh, Augusta! I can scarcely
e you for having meditated such a shock-
crifice! Mordaunt must have proved a
able possession to us, if it had been pur-
d at the expense of *your* happiness."
And yet," she replied, "*I* only wished to
done what I am sure *you* would have also
mpted, had you been placed in similar cir-
stances. And now remember, that I have
ted to your discretion; and that what you
e just heard is not to be repeated. No
nsideration would have induced me to com-
unicate those two gambling histories to any
ving person but yourself; nor would I even
ave confided them to *you*, if I had not felt
certain that they would never pass your lips."

Charles promised her they never should; but he did not deem it necessary to extend this promise to the whole of her communication. He thought it right that all those whose comfort she had been desirous to promote by her marriage, should be informed of the generous

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assembled: you must consequently make up your minds to be thrown together upon that occasion as old friends; and you may perhaps find it less awkward to walk into church in the same procession, if you have previously shaken hands in a more private party."

Lady Caroline Mortimer's pride would not allow her to betray the consternation she felt at Mr. O'Donnel's death. She was conscious that it must annihilate all her schemes and hopes; and her mortification and despair preyed upon her the more deeply from having been outwardly repressed: all her evil passions gained additional strength, and the tone of her mind became every day more reckless and desperate.

Charles Mordaunt's apprehensions about his sister proved too well founded. Augusta's spirits had been so violently and repeatedly agitated, that her nerves seemed entirely to have given way, and Mrs. Mordaunt perceived with alarm that she was really ill.

The cause that had affected her health of course rendered her peculiarly interesting to all her family, and made them most anxiously solicitous to promote her recovery. There was nothing in her case that threatened to become dangerous; and as quiet and change of scene

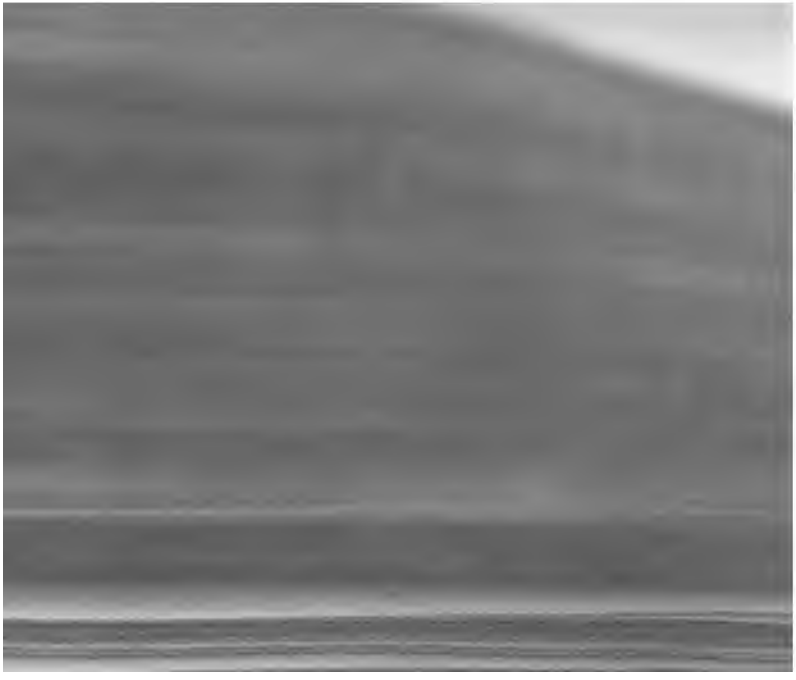


replied Augusta, "that you do not entirely approve of my conduct."

"Do you really wish me to explain to you what I think of it?"

"Yes, indeed I beg that you will."

"Well then," pursued Miss Stanley, "in my opinion you deserved the highest commendation, because you heroically determined, against your inclination, to do what you believed to be right and meritorious; and you were much to be pitied, because you acted upon an erroneous principle. You were so convinced of the integrity of your own purpose, so laudably anxious to secure the welfare of your relations, that you took but a partial view of the case that was proposed to you: you only saw it in one point of light; you only considered how it would affect those in whom *you* were interested, and you entirely forgot that it would concern others also. In fine, to speak plainly, my dear Augusta, it never occurred to you, that by consenting to sanction an injurious fraud, you made yourself a party and an accomplice in a scheme of dishonesty and injustice; and you actually put into practice that most specious and dangerous maxim of false morality, which tells us, 'that it is allowable to do evil in the hope that good may come out of it.'"



disciplined by trials;—you are now all that your friends can wish you to be, and I trust that future comfort and peace of mind will reward you for your past sorrows. You are perhaps not yet quite able to dispense with the guidance of a sage counsellor," she added with a smile: "Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt are much occupied by cares of their own; your brother is going to be married, and *I* cannot be always near you;—if you will take my advice, you will consequently lose no time in selecting some other guardian, who may be constantly at your elbow, and to whom you may have the advantage of applying for direction and assistance upon every occasion."

Augusta blushed deeply. "I cannot pretend to misunderstand you," she said; "but pray do not press me farther upon this subject. Such a counsellor and guide as you recommend, I might once have found,—but it is impossible to recall the past: my weak, credulous folly allowed me to be imposed upon; and, by believing he was unworthy of my esteem, to drive away from me for ever a person who was really too good for me, and too amiable in overlooking all my former silly and contemptible behaviour."

Miss Stanley immediately forbore to prolong

the discussion; she was satisfied with having ascertained that Lord Delmore's character was cleared from the imputation, whatever it might have been, that had been cast upon it; and from all she had previously heard of him, and of his attachment to Augusta, she felt a sanguine anticipation, that the hope Mrs. Mordaunt had expressed to her, that he might still become her son-in-law, would sooner or later be realized.

The Mordaunts had paid Mr. O'Donnel the compliment of wearing mourning for him as a cousin; but he had now been dead more than two months, and their weeds had of course been laid aside. Lord and Lady Estonville had been some time returned to the country; the period of Charles Mordaunt's marriage with Lady Agnes Mortimer had at length been fixed, and he was going over to Estonville for the purpose of finally settling the day on which it was to take place.

He had found an early opportunity of relating to his sister how generously Lord Delmore had come forward to assist him and Lady Agnes in the hour of difficulty. He did this without making any comment upon his friend's conduct; and Augusta, after praising it warmly,

looked much confused, and instantly turned the subject.

He had afterwards, in speaking of the arrangements preparatory to his marriage, mentioned to her, as if accidentally, that Lionel had promised him to be his *bride's-man* upon that occasion. The intelligence seemed to startle her very much, but she made no remark upon it, and her brother went on talking of other things.

The time had now arrived, however, when Charles thought he might successfully attempt a more decisive measure; and he went to look for his sister, who was sitting reading in the flower-garden.

"I am sorry to interrupt your studies," he said, "but I am come to say good-b'ye before I set out for Estonville. Our separation will not be a very long one, as you will see me again to-morrow."

"That may or may not be," replied Augusta with a smile; "I shall not expect you quite so soon."

"You are mistaken; I shall not certainly stay another day. I have just been telling my father and mother that I hope a friend of mine will accompany me to Mordaunt when I return;—I

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sary to contradict his suspicion, I suppose he imagines that it was tolerably correct."

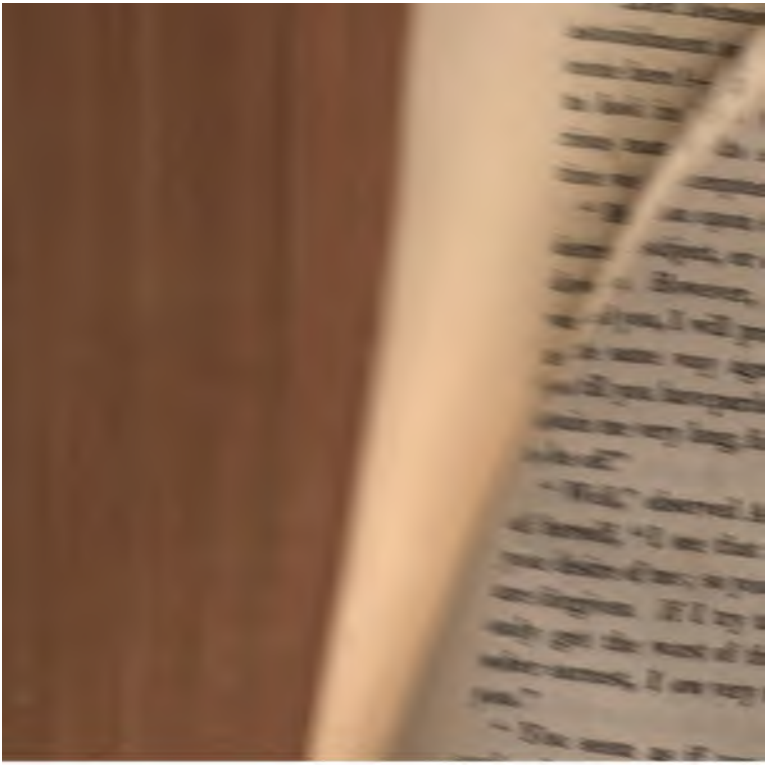
Augusta seemed much comforted by this representation.

"Yet, should Lord Delmore even forgive me," continued she, "for having been weak enough to credit malicious reports, what can he think of my having accepted ——"

She stopped short and blushed deeply.

"Such an abominable fellow as O'Donnel? you would say," pursued Charles. "The same idea had occurred to me, and as it struck me that Lionel might probably consider the last offence much the more heinous of the two, I will confess that I took the precaution of just hinting to him that you had not consented to marry our poor cousin from pure love and affection. Delmore happens, like yourself, to be rather chivalrous and enthusiastic in his opinions; and he admired you extremely for having resolved to make so heroic a sacrifice of your own feelings. Doubtless, too, it appeared to him all the more exemplary because O'Donnel had been removed from this world before he heard anything about it."

"I am willing to believe," said Augusta reproachfully, "that you have acted with the kindest intention; but I should not have



n your best gown,
e my companion and
Mordaunt. We shall
very good time."
ng, Charles, I shall be
d to see Lord Delmore. In
l it be possible for me to re-

!—nothing will be easier. When
im before you, you have only to
as a dear friend of mine whom I de-
honour—as a near relation of Agnes
ner's, and as a person you might your-
never have seen before in your life. And
w adieu. You affect to dread the approach
f the guest I am going to bring you; but I suspect you would be very much disappointed if I were to return alone to-morrow."

Augusta followed her brother with her eyes as he walked rapidly away from her: all that had just passed appeared so like a dream, that she scarcely dared to believe it was really true. Was it possible Lord Delmore could still be attached to her? She feared it was not; yet Charles seemed to be in his confidence, and if such had been *his* opinion, he could not surely have wished to bring him to Mordaunt. Disappointment had become so familiar to her,

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Mrs. Mordaunt could not help smiling at this concluding remark, but she took no other notice of it; and her conversation during the evening related almost exclusively to Charles's affairs.

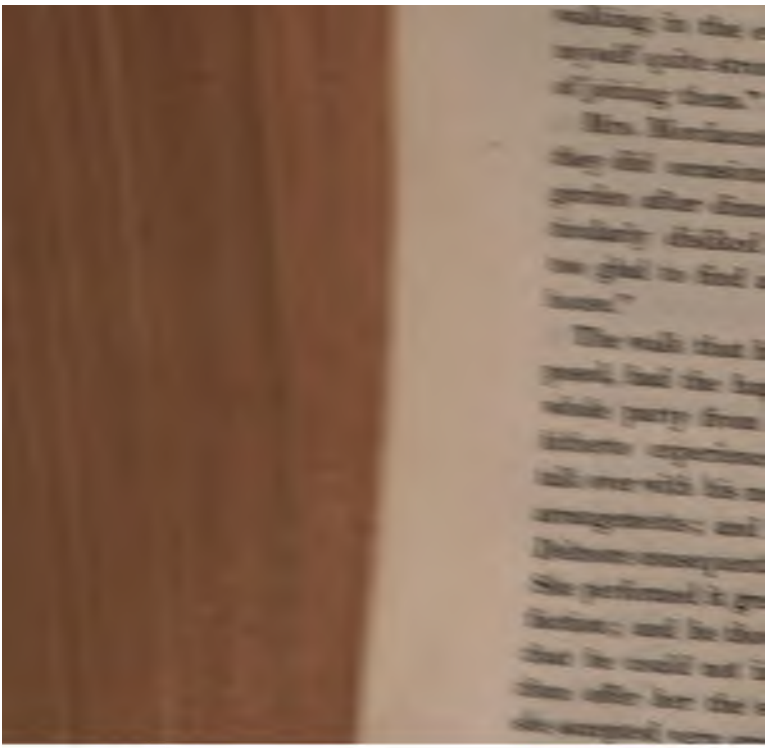
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that she would do her best to entertain their visitor; and soon after his departure she perceived two cavaliers advancing across the park. Augusta saw them also, and in spite of her endeavours to maintain her composure, she was much agitated when Lionel and her brother actually walked into the room.

The latter told her afterwards, "that she had blushed most beautifully, and that her confusion had been extremely becoming to her." Lord Delmore himself looked a good deal embarrassed, but Mrs. Mordaunt and her son contrived to keep up an animated conversation, which began by degrees to grow more general.

At length Charles asked his sister if she had been out that morning? And when she replied that she had not, he observed, "that it was a great pity to lose the enjoyment of such a fine day. Why should we not take a walk now?" added he, addressing himself to his mother. "There would be plenty of time, and a ramble by moonlight will be out of the question. Delmore is under my guardianship at present, and I do not consider him yet sufficiently robust to expose himself with impunity to the raw evening fogs."

"Upon my word, Charles," said Lord Del-



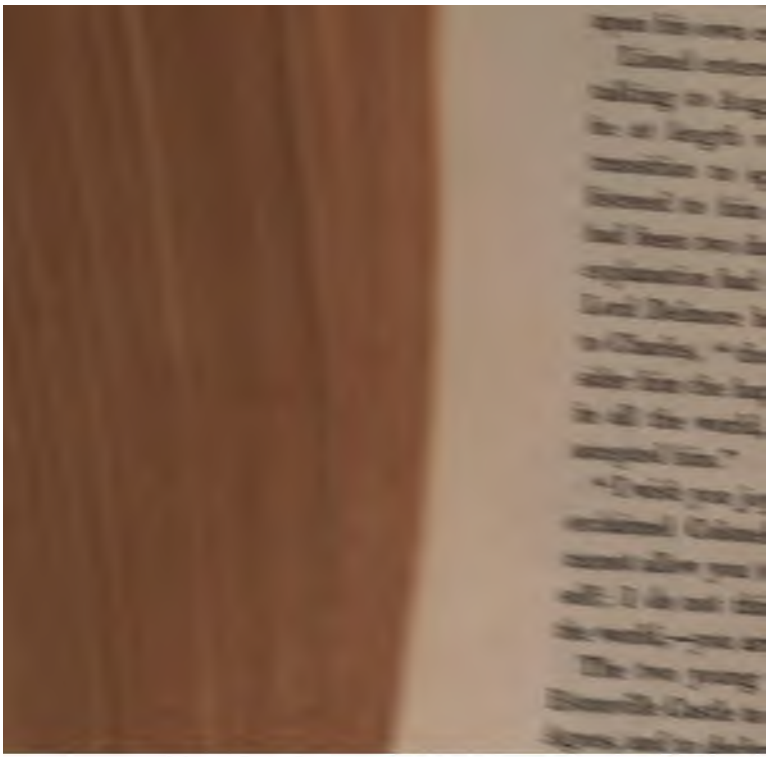
"How very pretty this is!" he observed.

"I am glad you think it so," replied Augusta; "it is a very favourite spot of mine. I have learned to understand flowers," she added with a smile, "a little better than I did when I met you at Mr. Wingfield's."

This remark naturally recalled to Lord Delmore's recollection those days he had spent at his neighbour's; he spoke of them with evident pleasure, and endeavoured to remind his companion of a variety of trifling incidents which had occurred during "that very agreeable visit."

The subject was by no means unwelcome to Augusta; it carried her back to one of the most unclouded years of her life; and as they retraced their Yorkshire adventures, both she and Lionel appeared to have forgotten the painful trials they had suffered since that period, and by the time they reached the house they felt as much at their ease with each other as they had done when they parted at Mr. Wingfield's.

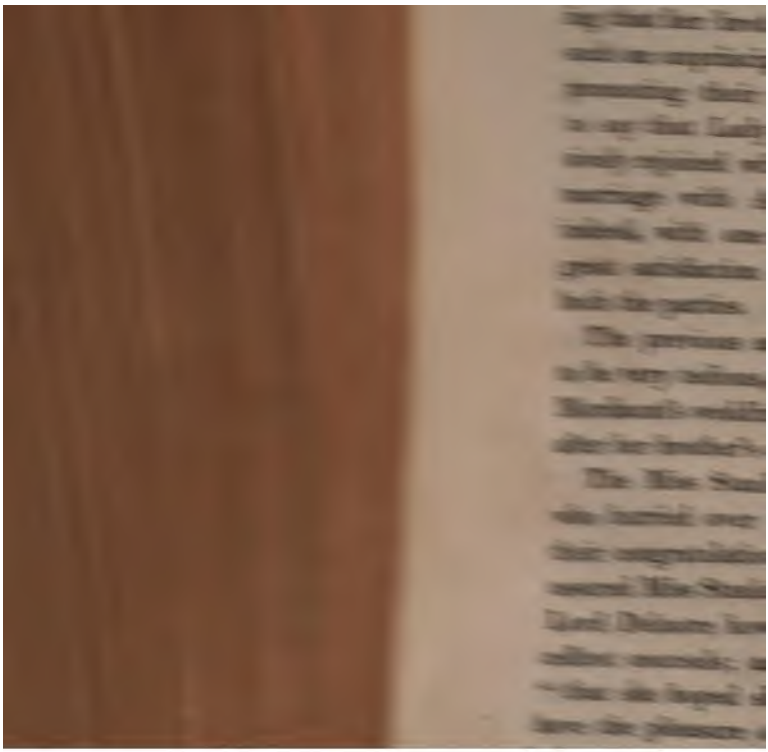
Charles had perceived that all was going on right, and he exchanged a smile of intelligence with his mother when he saw Lord Delmore dividing with Augusta the roses he had carried home for her.



set out. "Augusta, if I were in your place, I should scarcely believe my life in safety during the first paroxysms of her jealous rage. Such things cannot be done with impunity in these times, otherwise I could perfectly fancy her standing before you like Queen Eleanor of old, with a poniard in one hand and a cup of poison in the other."

"Poor Lady Caroline!" replied Augusta, "she has certainly tormented me severely; but I need not be afraid of her now. She has lost all power of harming me again, and the weapons she employed against my peace have at length been turned upon her to destroy her own. I do not at this moment feel inclined to bear malice towards any one,—I wish to forgive her, and, culpable as she is, I cannot help pitying her."

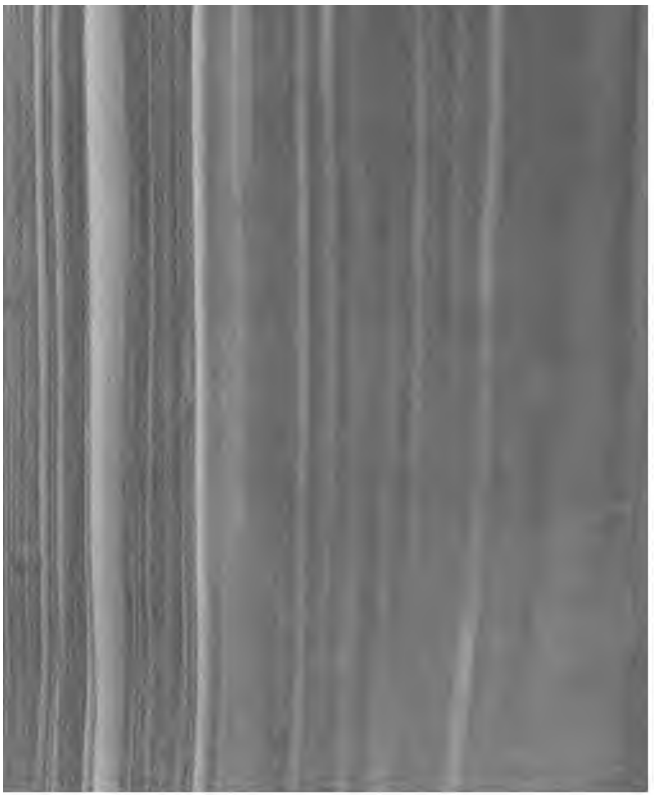
Lionel was charmed with the amiable generosity of these sentiments. Augusta had told him the story Lady Caroline had invented to calumniate him, and had also confessed all the unworthy arts her ladyship had previously employed to lower him in her estimation. His disgust and indignation at his cousin's treachery may well be imagined, and he shuddered when he reflected how nearly it had ruined Miss Mordaunt's and his own happiness for ever.



blishment—including, of course, Mr. and Mrs. Barker, as well as of the poor people in the village of Mordaunt, were poured out for her happiness: nor must the delight which Lord Delmore's faithful servant Fletcher experienced at the prospect of his master's approaching marriage be forgotten. He happened to meet Charles Mordaunt in the passage, the morning after the news had become known, and he could not resist stopping him.

"Ah, Colonel Mordaunt!" he exclaimed, "my lord has just been telling me something that has rejoiced my heart. I guessed how it would be when I heard we were coming with you here. My lord has thought of nobody but Miss Mordaunt ever since he fell in love with her at Mr. Wingfield's; I could observe that plain enough. He will be quite a different person now. He will have no more such frightful illnesses as he had last winter: it was no *cold* that was the matter with him then—it was all upon his mind."

Fletcher was not mistaken. Lord Delmore did indeed become quite a different person when his marriage had given him an object to attach himself to, and to lead him to take an interest in the world. Augusta's character was peculiarly suited to his own; their tastes and



more's was one of the best and most com-
te places he knew anywhere."

The Dowager Lady Delmore was much
eased with Augusta. She had been told that
e was beautiful, and that circumstance gra-
fied her vanity; but she found her much
ore amiable, and more devoted to her hus-
nd, than she had expected to see her, from all
at she had heard of her. "Lionel," her
dyship said, "had been particularly lucky
his choice. He would have been miserable
he had married a fine lady whose satisfaction
d been centred in flirting, and in London
ciety. His character was so unambitious,
d he had so many romantic ideas, that no
ife would have suited him who had not proved
a domestic turn, and been willing to enter
to all his fancies, as Lady Delmore did: *she*
ally seemed to have been made on purpose
r him."

It would have been impossible for any *ménage*
go on more happily than Charles Mor-
aunt's, or for two persons to be more thorough-
satisfied with their lot than he and Lady
gnes. During the first years of their mar-
age, they spent much of their time at D'Arcy;
d Lionel and Augusta never failed to visit
em in return, as often as they could con-

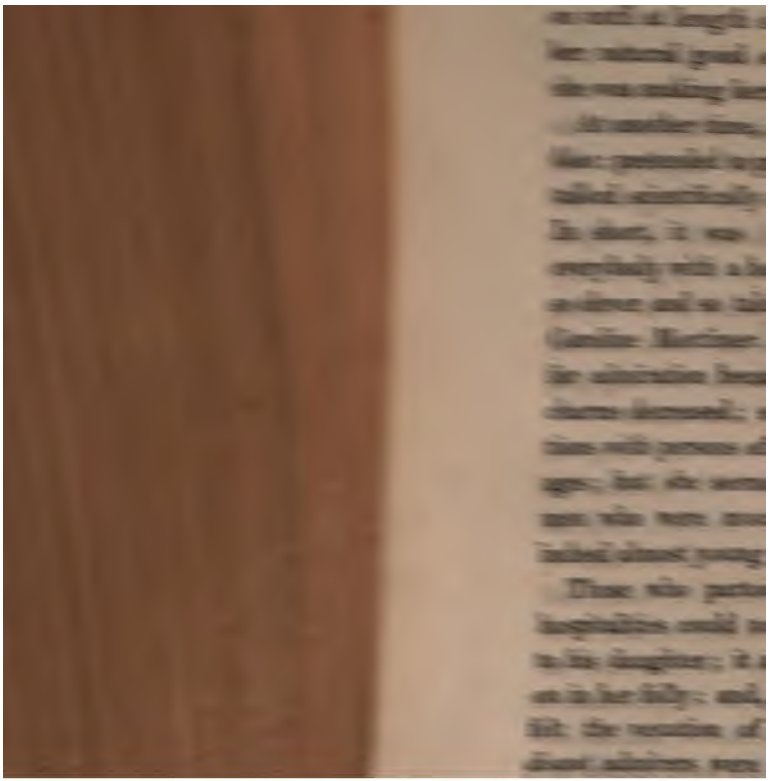
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him in the handsomest manner. It was
ll value, yet it enabled him immediately
lize his long-cherished hope of marrying
Stanley; and as this piece of preferment
nly a few miles from Mordaunt, its situ-
made it particularly desirable to them

dward was exemplary in the performance
ll the duties of his profession; and even
. Mordaunt confessed that he had done
wisely in selecting Laura Stanley as his
mate.

Little remains to be told of Lady Caroline
ortimer, whose future life was in every sense
the word a very miserable one. She never
covered the mortification of seeing Lord Del-
ore actually united to Augusta Mordaunt:
om that moment she became perfectly reck-
ss, and seemed to take a pleasure in setting
he opinion of the world at defiance. The
ctivity of her mind kept her constantly en-
gaged in some project or pursuit; and the
extreme vanity of her character made her al-
ways eager to grasp at distinction in any or in
every shape. At one time, she entered vio-
lently into politics; declaimed with wild elo-
quence upon the questions that happened at
the instant to arrest the public attention, and



towards every girl who possessed the advantages of youth and beauty; and as she had not married herself, she had no pleasure so great as attempting to prevent other people's marriages.

It may easily be imagined that she subjected herself to mortifications without end; but the severest of all the punishments she endured, was witnessing the happiness and comfort her relations enjoyed. Augusta and her sister Agnes were particularly the objects of her envy; she was always in ungovernably ill-humour when they happened to be staying at Estonville Castle; and she could scarcely bear the sight of her beautiful and engaging little cousins, and nephews, and nieces.

Lady Mary Carrington went on flirting first with one person and then with another, and caring less and less for her husband, until her giddy and unprincipled career was cut short by a premature death. She caught a violent cold from being exposed to a shower of rain in returning from a water-party: she had other engagements which she could not be persuaded to give up to take care of her health; and the consequence was, that the cold soon turned to a rapid decline. She would not at first believe that she could be in danger; but she came to a

[redacted]

part of his communication; and as she could not bring herself entirely to credit its truth, she determined to go down to Mordaunt to make inquiries respecting her beloved Mr. Richard O'Donnel. There she not only ascertained the certainty of his death — she also learnt the dreadful circumstances that had attended it: and the shock she thus received was so great, that her shattered reason gave way at once; and although she lived for several years, it was in a state of hopeless and incurable insanity.

THE END.

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